

Playing the Crowd: Mass Pageantry in Europe and the United States, 1905-1935

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation brings to light a theatrical and political genre I call “mass pageantry,” which emerged in England, the United States, Russia and Germany during the early twentieth century. Performed out-of-doors, often with thousands of amateur local performers in costume, these vast mytho-historical spectacles emerged from unusual alliances between playwrights and directors seeking to transform theater as a cultural practice, and political organizations seeking new ways to gain the allegiance of the working classes. Because mass pageants arose in significantly different political contexts, they have been primarily discussed in single-nation studies by historians of culture and politics. This trend has inadvertently led to a general neglect of their status as theatrical events and to a false distinction between American and British “pageants,” which are frequently dismissed as nostalgia, and Soviet and German “spectacles,” which are often reduced to propaganda. This dissertation demonstrates that despite significant differences in the political impulses behind these events, they together represent a complex and imaginative transnational theatrical genre defined by shared techniques and a common purpose. It argues that the emergence of mass pageantry points to a shared cultural goal—to reinvent theater as an art form created for and by “the people”—as well to a common social problem for which pageants were seen as a promising solution: how to reconstitute “peoples” from the “crowds” produced by mass culture, industrialization and political upheaval.

Chapter One locates the emergence of mass pageantry at the intersection of two nineteenth-century intellectual currents: the development of “crowd theory” and the growth of people’s theater movements. Chapters Two, Three and Four each focus on a single pageant: *The*

Sherborne Pageant (England, 1908), written and directed by Louis Napoleon Parker; *The Masque of St. Louis* (US, 1914), written by Percy MacKaye; and *Towards a World Commune* (RSFSR, 1920), created by a team of five directors. To demonstrate the ways in which mass pageants competed with one another for the attention of audiences, as well as how theories and techniques of mass pageantry were adapted for a new medium, Chapter Five surveys mass pageants of the Weimar period in Germany and examines Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 film, *Triumph of the Will*, through the lens of mass pageantry.

This dissertation demonstrates that pageant-devisers, influenced as often by transnational artistic movements and socio-theatrical reform efforts as by the political agenda of pageant sponsors, generated their own visions of collective life through the mass pageants they created. Although their ideas were in varying degrees informed by theories emerging from the burgeoning field of "crowd theory," I argue that pageants are best understood as contributing performative ideas of their own making to an ongoing debate rather than as stagings of crowd theories already in existence. Together they articulate a consensus about the role theater can and should play in the representation and transformation of actual crowds, and by extension, in the transformation of social life and culture more broadly.

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Chapter One

Mass Pageantry and the Problem of the Crowd in the Early Twentieth Century

In the early decades of the twentieth century, England, the United States, the Soviet Union and Germany were foremost amongst nations experiencing an extraordinary surge of interest in the development of a form of political theater I call the *mass pageant*. Imagined on the largest possible scale, mass pageants recruited thousands of individuals—the majority of whom had never stepped onto a stage—to perform for audiences numbering in the tens of thousands. Whereas European pageant traditions in earlier centuries foregrounded the authority of religion or of the monarch, mass pageants after the turn of the twentieth century featured “the people” as protagonists of vast mytho-historical dramas in which the single plot remained largely unchanged whether the pageant was staged in Edwardian England or in post-revolutionary Russia: from humble origins the people rise to prominence; they meet with and survive oppressive conditions; they engage in battle with modern forces of evil such as industrialization, migration, war and capitalism; they endure painful sacrifices on behalf of the collective good. In the end, the people emerge victorious, with a renewed faith in the continuity, strength and future prosperity of their communities.

Mass pageants were performed out-of-doors on stages, in open fields, or in public spaces specially adapted for the purpose. Their scale and complexity necessitated the formation of unusual alliances between theater artists seeking to revolutionize the meaning and scope of theater as a cultural practice, social reformers eager to guide the development of the masses, and political organizations in search of new ways to maintain their allegiance. Although the majority of mass pageants were created by individuals and groups with little theatrical training, the most well-known among them were devised by prominent writers and directors of the day. No single

or dominant aesthetic marked the work of these pageant-devisers. Their inclinations ran the gamut from symbolist allegory to realist re-enactment to futurist abstraction. Although they debated over details of form, content and method, they nevertheless agreed on at least three points: that the art of theater had run aground in a split between popular and elite forms; that the survival of theatrical art in the twentieth century depended on its ability to speak to and for the masses; and that when individuals come together to perform an imagined past, they become capable of overcoming whatever conflicts exist between them in the present, and of forging new collective identities that prepare them for the challenges of the future.

In considering the question of why this distinctive form of mass participatory theater emerged with such force in the early decades of the twentieth century, the few existing full-length studies of mass pageants offer similar answers. With varying degrees of complexity, they tend to presume that political agenda specific to the nations in which pageants took place are of greater significance than any transnational sociocultural or artistic concerns. David Glassberg's *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (1990) explains the emergence of the American pageantry movement in relation to Progressive Era demands for social reform.¹ James von Geldern's *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (1993) attributes the success of the post-revolutionary mass festivals to the way they "[reflected] the most attractive sides of the Bolshevik uprising and [animated] the historical vision that lay at its center."² In *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (1996) Jeffrey Schnapp theorizes that the Italian mass spectacle, *18BL*, "was able to put itself forward as a

¹ David Glassberg, *American Pageantry: the Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 4.

² James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals: 1917-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3.

solution to anxieties regarding the inadequacy of fascist culture.”³ Although these studies offer sound arguments concerning the question of why mass pageants would have received the support of political authorities in the particular nations with which they are concerned, they cannot (and do not propose to) explain why mass theatrical-political dramas so similar in form and method would have flourished in the fundamentally different political circumstances that existed in Edwardian England, in the United States during the Progressive Era, in Fascist Italy, in Bolshevik Russia and in Weimar Germany. Although I propose a markedly different explanation for this phenomenon than does Erika Fischer-Lichte in *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theater* (2005)—an important transnational study that I will address in greater detail towards the end of this chapter—it is notable that Fischer-Lichte is the only scholar to have addressed the question at all.

Single-culture studies of pageants have been invaluable for the depth of their engagement with the specific historical contexts in which pageants were performed. However, by inadvertently contributing to the perpetuation of a misleading division, they have also, unfortunately, posed something of a barrier to understanding the broader transnational forces that informed the development of mass pageantry across Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century. Russian and German pageants of this period, customarily referred to as “mass spectacles” in English language scholarship, are still generally regarded as instruments of political propaganda. By contrast, those that took place in England and the United States, usually called “historical pageants,” continue to be dismissed as ideologically innocent expressions of tradition. This categorical division has its basis in post-Second World War liberal political discourses that posited firm distinctions between the cultural forms of “western” democracies

³ Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 9.

(i.e. Great Britain, the United States and their allies) and those of “eastern” authoritarian regimes (i.e. the USSR, its allies and satellites). Recognizing that “from the present side of the temporal divide, the cultural forms that existed in ‘East’ and ‘West’ (to use the Eurocentric terminology of the Cold War) appear uncannily similar” Susan Buck-Morss has pointed to the need of scholarship that challenges the often arbitrary categorizations that dominated Cold War cultural discourse.⁴

Indeed, the limited value of Cold War efforts to distinguish between “democratic” and “demagogic” forms of mass political theater becomes apparent the moment one begins to pay attention to the aesthetic dimensions of “historical pageants” and “mass spectacles”—to their dramaturgical forms, to the methods of organization and production they adopted, to the theories of mass theater their devisers expressed and to the performances themselves. The similarities one discovers are striking enough to require more specific and convincing explanations than those rooted in politics. This is neither to claim that the political programs that supported various pageantry movements are in some essential sense all alike, nor is to claim that no significant differences existed between pageants and spectacles of various kinds. Rather, it is to argue that the differences between British liberalism, American progressivism, Russian communism, and competing political agenda in Weimar Germany do not wholly or even primarily account for the aesthetic distinctions that can be made between events variously described as historical pageants, mass spectacles and mass festivals. This dissertation argues instead that what accounts for both the continuities that may be traced across pageants and spectacles taking place in different countries, as well as for the significant differences between them, are the ways in which the pageant-devisers responsible for their creation tackled difficult questions about how such events

⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), x.

could be used to understand, engage, instruct, represent, reform and transform the modern Crowd.

Understood simultaneously as a figure of political revolution, of social disintegration and of cultural decline, the figure of the crowd was prominent in early twentieth-century discourse concerning the relations between politics, art and society. Though it first came to the attention of European intellectuals through Hippolyte Taine's multi-volume *Origins of Contemporary France* (1876-94), it was Gustave Le Bon's international bestseller, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1896), which popularized ideas about imitation, contagion and "collective mind."⁵ The question of how to rule the crowd was, to be sure, a *political* one for leaders and parties in the era of popular sovereignty. Indeed, crowd historian J.S. McClelland contends that "after 1848 a large part of the story of the invention of the modern state . . . could be written as [its] attempt to accommodate itself to and to cope with the crowd."⁶ However, the question of how to hold the attention of the crowd presented an equally significant *cultural* dilemma for artists of the serious theater. The same "people" for whom the idea of a "people's theater" was named (i.e. the working classes) was, at the turn of the century, matching its increasing participation in political life with an increasing attraction to the products of mass culture: commercial entertainments and distractions of seemingly endless variety that, from the perspective of many intellectuals, served only to corrupt human experience and further weaken social bonds. It was not only the state, therefore, which had to learn new ways of coping with the crowd if it hoped to survive. European socialists and liberals (among whom we may count nearly all pageant-devisers) saw crowds not as irrational, violent mobs, but as legitimate representations of the will of the people. The problem for them was not how to repress them, but how to

⁵ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1897), 2.

⁶ J.S. McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 3.

communicate with them across ever-widening cultural divides, and how to represent them to themselves in such a way that they would begin to acquire legitimate political authority.

The pageant-devisers of the early twentieth century developed their mass dramas in an environment in which competing ideas about crowds—as overly reactive or too passive, as revolutionary, progressive or conservative, as omens of the decline of civilization or as vehicles for spiritual transcendence—were everywhere to be found. To interpret the shape and meaning of crowds was to assess the condition of the larger civic body and to begin to reflect on one’s own set of relations to that body. To represent crowds—whether through literature, art, film or theater—was not only to take on the role of social critic, but also to rise to the challenge of representing subjects that seemed to exceed ordinary means of representation.

Given the complex intersection of social theory, political myth-making, and theatrical experimentation one finds in the early twentieth-century mass pageants, my analytical approach in this dissertation has been led by questions concerning the ways in which pageants negotiated competing concepts of collectivity (crowds, mobs, peoples, masses, publics, and others), the ways in which they constructed and represented these collectivities both on and offstage, and the ways in which they attempted to transform not only the actual crowds of performers and spectators who participated in the live event, but also, through them, the absent, virtual crowds that had come to metonymically represent all of society. Chapters Two, Three and Four each focus on a single pageant: *The Sherborne Pageant* (England, 1908), written and directed by Louis Napoleon Parker; *The Masque of St. Louis* (US, 1914), written by Percy MacKaye; and *Towards a World Commune* (RSFSR, 1920), created by a team of five directors. In order to consider how mass pageants competed with one another for the attention of audiences, as well as the way in which theories and techniques of mass pageantry were adapted for a new medium,

Chapter Five surveys mass pageants of the Weimar period in Germany and examines Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 film, *Triumph of the Will*, through the lens of mass pageantry. Although my research has been informed by investigations into the social, political and cultural networks in which these pageants were embedded, the aim of this dissertation is not to use pageants to condemn, to praise, or even to explain historical moments, however significant these may be. Instead, it is to understand the theories, methods, and practices that were mobilized by early twentieth-century theater artists for the purposes of representing the un-representable crowd.

This dissertation demonstrates that pageant-devisers, influenced as often by transnational artistic movements and socio-theatrical reform efforts as by the political agenda of pageant sponsors, generated their own visions of collective life through the mass pageants they created. These sometimes aligned well with the social and political views of those in positions of power, but at other times did not. Most often, pageant-devisers strove to achieve far more extensive and intensive changes in society than any of their patrons dared to imagine. Far from simply dressing up political theories in theatrical form and parading them in front of the credulous masses, pageant-devisers aimed to re-imagine the relations between social, political and cultural life by recreating the *demos* within the transformational sphere of the theater. Although their ideas were in varying degrees informed by the ideas of social theorists including Le Bon, Durkheim and others—and for that reason their works help to make explicit the work of social experimentation done by the pageants—I argue that pageants are best understood as contributing performative ideas of their own making to an ongoing conversation rather than as stagings of crowd theories already in existence. Together they articulate a consensus about the role theater can and should play in the representation and transformation of actual crowds, and by extension, in the transformation of social life and culture more broadly.

Festivals of the People during the Age of Revolution

To understand how the idea of the crowd comes to play a critical role in forming the social, cultural and aesthetic aims of early twentieth-century mass pageants, it is useful to briefly consider the particular way in which “the people”—as the idealized other of “the crowd”—takes shape towards the end of the eighteenth century. However it is necessary first to explain my approach to the problem of “crowd” terminology, which follows that taken by J.S. McClelland. McClelland’s taxonomy depends upon the existence of an observer who perceives himself to be separate from or outside of the collective he is observing, not only because he is not physically a part of it, but also because he is in a superior social class:

[The] interchangeability of words like “the people,” crowd and mob, (and later mass and “the masses”) is necessary only in minds which are already disposed to see the mob everywhere. [Such] minds are not likely to be very discriminating. If there are discriminations to be made on their behalf then “the people” is what they might call those unlike themselves when they co-operate actively in a common enterprise . . . ; “the crowd” might refer to those unlike themselves when they are in a passive state, and so requiring leadership if any common enterprise is to be undertaken; and “mob” refers to them when they create mayhem and are in danger of finding leaders of their own.⁷

How collectives are named, McClelland suggests, has more to do with the social position and perspective of the namer than with any inherent properties of the collective. Following McClelland, I do not attempt to offer systematic definitions of various terms that have been used to describe groups of human beings; rather I opt, for the most part, to elicit the meaning of these terms from the particular thinkers discussed in each chapter as well as from the performative meanings proposed by the pageants themselves. Nevertheless, wherever explicit definitions serve to clarify an understanding of what is at stake in a particular pageant, they may be considered as relevant only in that limited context. So for example, the meaning of the word “crowd” changes significantly as it moves from one chapter to the next, while terms such as “folk,” “public,”

⁷ McClelland, 7-8.

“proletariat,” *trudiashchiesia*, and *Volk* and occupy more stable positions, but only in relation to a particular set of historical circumstances.

McClelland’s definition of the people as others “when they co-operate actively in a common enterprise” provides a neat description of the collective figure that emerged in the 1790 Festival of Federation in Paris. Though it was not the first of the new revolutionary festivals, the Festival of Federation was, by all contemporary accounts, a “true” festival; indeed, it might be suggested that the event defined the meaning of festivity for the era of mass popular sovereignty, and is therefore the chief predecessor of the early twentieth-century mass pageants. To celebrate the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, the mayor of Paris proposed a general celebration on the Champs de Mars and invited delegations from cities and provinces throughout the nation. Although more than twelve thousand workers were enlisted to transform the parade ground into an amphitheater before the arrival of the expected crowds, the task proved so enormous that a general call for volunteers went out. What followed has been described by Mona Ozouf as an “almost too edifying story of administrative incompetence saved by the enthusiasm and initiative of the Parisians themselves—men and women, old and young, rich and poor—who worked together and successfully completed the work in time.”⁸ The various elements of the tale, which include inter-class cooperation, the loosening of gender roles, spontaneous bursts of singing and dancing, joyful labor, and communal self-organization are all the more remarkable in that they appear to be true.⁹ From the perspective of the present day, the mass pageants of the

⁸ Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1988), 45.

⁹ See Ozouf, 42-49. The mass political performances that took place in the early years of the French Revolution, as well as in the later Thermidorian and Directorial periods, were accorded a central place in the progress of the revolution by most politicians and artists of the period. As instruments of cultural and political education, and as compensation for the loss of stability provided by the King and the Church, they were regarded even by political opponents as necessary to the restoration of the social bond. Much like the mass pageants of the twentieth century, the festivals were performed on national holidays or on special civic occasions. The participation of regular citizens

early twentieth century appear to be attempts to recreate in some respect the spirit of the Festival of Federation and the people it brought forth whether or not their devisers were aware of the tale.

The numerous “invented traditions”—including pageants, spectacles and other forms of political festivity—created during what Eric Hobsbawm has termed the “Age of Revolution” (1788-1848)—became necessary and possible only when emerging nation-states in the first half of the nineteenth century began to open political participation to the working classes and when, at the same time, the legitimate exercise of state authority began to depend upon the backing of popular consensus.¹⁰ If civic pageants between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries served primarily to legitimize, extend and consolidate political power as invested in monarchs, the most obvious, and most significant difference between pageants of the late medieval and early modern periods, and pageants in the Age of Revolution is that the protagonists of the latter are in all cases the people conceived of as both subject *and* emerging sovereign.

Generally speaking, the people in a mass pageant embody an idea of the nation as separate and distinct from the state. That the people should exist prior to the formation of the state is essential to the chief political aim of the mass pageants. By performing in and witnessing episodes that show, for example, the ancestors of the inhabitants of Flanders *choosing* the state and its leaders to guard their interests, the present-day inhabitants of the region (as both actors

was seen as central to their success, as was the level of artistry they displayed and the clarity of the political messages they staged. The post-revolutionary period in France boasted both large scale urban pageants designed by prominent artists, as well as smaller pageants organized by amateurs in rural and extra-urban areas. The most extensive discussion of the festivals is Mona Ozouf’s *Festivals and the French Revolution*. See also Lynne Hunt, *Politics, Class and Culture in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and James Livesey’s *Making Democracy in the French Revolution* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2008), 195-225.

¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London: Orion, 2010); Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13-14.

and spectators) may affirm and re-authorize the state's legitimacy.¹¹ Indeed, the transformation from loosely self-governed (or illegitimately governed) collective subjects to *citizens* endowed with state-instituted rights and responsibilities is a motif staged (often more than once) in nearly every mass pageant. Since the late eighteenth century mass pageants, spectacles and festivals have helped to build the mythologies upon which every nation-state depends, giving life and meaning to the documents, buildings, monuments, sites, symbols, legends, and heroes upon which the state rests its authority.

In the era of mass democratic politics ushered in by the French Revolution, the mass pageant, spectacle or festival was, as Ozouf remarks, "an indispensable complement to the legislative system, for although the legislator makes laws for the people, festivals make the people for the laws."¹² However, the problem of "making the people" not only affected the rulers of emerging nation-states during the Age of Revolution; it affected all those whose lives had been radically altered by the loss of traditional social structures. Eric Hobsbawm concedes that "there is probably no time and place with which historians are concerned which has not seen the "invention of tradition," which he defines as "practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past."¹³ Despite the fact that invented traditions existed long before the end of the eighteenth century, Hobsbawm maintains that: We should expect [these] to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had

¹¹ See Thomas Crombez, "Liturgy and Mass Spectacle: the Case of Catholic Mass Theatre in Flanders during the Interwar Period," *Performance Research*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2008), 55-63.

¹² Ozouf, 9.

¹³ Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1.

been designed. . . . Such changes have been particularly significant in the past 200 years, and it is therefore reasonable to expect these instant formalizations of new traditions to cluster during this period.¹⁴ For Hobsbawm, it is not only that invented traditions follow generally accepted rules, that they incorporate ritual and symbolism, and that they inculcate norms in order to establish continuity with the past. Invented traditions are those that arise whenever there is *broad-based consensus*—from “above” (i.e., the perspective of formal rulers and dominant groups) as well as from “below” (i.e., the perspective of subjects and citizens)—that rapid changes in social, political, economic and cultural life have weakened or destroyed the traditional social order.¹⁵ Recognizing the urgent need for new traditions that would repair social bonds, the makers of pageants, spectacles and festivals in the Age of Revolution sought to formalize their methods as quickly as possible in order to speed up processes of collective self-recognition that in the normal course of historical time took centuries to establish.

Although no attempts to propagandize festivals can ever be wholly successful, what became a predictable pattern in the rise and fall of twentieth-century pageant movements was already evident in the decade following the Festival of Federation: first, the extension of the idea of the festival for specific political purposes and in the interest of particular political actors; second, increasing definition of the symbolic language of festivals and greater regulation of its mechanisms for popular participation; third, the development of a greater role in the creation of festivals for theorists and professionals; finally, the eventual failure of the festivals to live up to their democratic promise. Although revolutionary festivals would continue to be staged until the close of the eighteenth century, the 1794 Festival of Supreme Being, almost wholly conceived and engineered by Maximilien de Robespierre, with the help of the painter Jacques-Louis David

¹⁴ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, 263-265.

and the playwright Marie-Joseph Chénier, stands as the preeminent model of the “coercive utopian” festival: one in which improvisation is reduced to an absolute minimum, authority is centralized, systems of surveillance and punishment are instituted, and in which roles are strategically distributed so as to achieve a “fantasy return to the equality of origins.”¹⁶

The extent to which the failure of mass theatrical experiments to live up to their democratic promise may be avoidable is a problem bound up with the “paradoxical logic of popular sovereignty” articulated by Susan Buck-Morss (borrowing obliquely from François Furet):

Now, when sovereignty claims to be democratic, the collective itself is alleged to act. The interests of the people are said to be immediately, transparently reflected in the sovereign agent, who therefore has absolute power. But the logical trick in this argument is that the collective of the “people” that supposedly constitutes the democratic sovereignty does not exist until that sovereignty is constituted. There *is* no collective until the “democratic” sovereign—precisely in the act of naming the enemy—calls that collective into being.”¹⁷

And in fact the primary function of all the festivals of the French Revolution and certainly all the mass pageants of the early twentieth century was to call “democratic” collectives into being in such a way that the collective would see itself as identical with already-existing governing bodies, and also opposite to whatever other collective (real or imagined) was deemed a threat to that body. The fiction common to all versions of “the people” is that they organically emerge from latent, unconscious, collective desires. Susan Buck-Morss perceives that collectives of this kind primarily come into being through the act of naming an enemy. The connection between creating “the people” and mass pageantry is, therefore, borne out by the fact that all mass pageants introduce an external enemy (often several) against which “the people” must fight to secure its sovereignty. In the *Sherborne Pageant*, the first external enemy is the Danish invaders,

¹⁶ Ozouf, 114.

¹⁷ Buck-Morss, 9.

while the second is the Church of England. In the *Masque of St. Louis* Indian “savages” must be conquered before the power of greedy industrialists can be tackled. In *Towards a World Commune* the enemy is first the Tsar, second “yellow Socialists,” and third, the Kerensky government.

Yet, to take Buck-Morss’ insight a step further, the act of naming an enemy or enemies in a pageant not only serves to call the collective of the people into being, it also disguises the fact that the primary threat to the ideal of democratic sovereignty represented as the people is not external to the people, but is, in fact, the people itself—or to call it by its pejorative name: the crowd. Indeed, given that the external enemies represented in the pageants had in most cases already been soundly defeated (Danes, “Indians,” the Tsar), the need to drum up popular resistance to such enemies cannot serve as the primary reason for which pageants received such strong support from politicians. It comes nearer to the truth to say that mass pageants arose as a result of a widespread recognition that major changes in the political sphere were not sufficient to the task of transforming society—and in particular the life of the laboring masses—for the better. Therefore, contrary to the assumption underlying most analyses of these events, mass pageants were never *primarily* intended as instruments of political persuasion, but rather to make real the social and cultural transformations that new laws and new law-makers could not. By setting out to transform (or reform) the allegedly degenerate psychological tendencies, cultural inclinations, and physical movements of crowds, mass pageants aimed to speed up the process of turning them into peoples.

Theater, Ritual and Collective Sentiment in the Era of Crowds

Whereas pageants created after the French Revolution can best be distinguished from pageants of earlier centuries by articulating their connection with the development of the nation-state, the rise

of popular sovereignty, and the re-invention of the people, the differences between these and the pageants discussed in this dissertation, all of which all took place after the start of the twentieth century, are best explained by the emergence of a widespread interest in the drama of “the crowd,” a figure that begins to secure its place in European social, political and cultural discourse during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The crowd, put simply, is the people’s “other.” Symbolizing social discord, injustice, violence and chaos, the figure of the crowd helps to sustain the ideal of the people as harmonious, democratic, rational and unified. After briefly explaining how the crowd idea comes to acquire authority in this period, I look to two competing versions of “collective sentiment”—from Gustave Le Bon and Émile Durkheim—to explain the complex reasons that the mass pageants appeared as potential solutions to the problem of social disintegration.

Historians of crowd theory agree that 1871 was the year that the crowd first took center stage in discussions of social, political and cultural life in Europe. In that year, newspapers in every part of the globe deluged their readers with shocking accounts of the final episodes of the short-lived Paris Commune. These accounts repeatedly register outrage at the sight of Parisian workers, including many women and children, burning the city’s homes and buildings to the ground, murdering hostages including the Archbishop of Paris, and looting and destroying the city’s most cherished cultural sites: the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Tuileries and the Louvre. If the French working classes held nothing sacred—neither private property, nor religion, nor traditional family roles, nor their own cultural treasures—it meant that something had likely gone terribly wrong with the project of European civilization. While Paris burned in front of him, one British reporter wrote that the Commune “revealed to us of what stuff our civilization is made.”¹⁸

¹⁸ “The State of Paris,” *Times of India* (6 July 1871), 4. The Paris Commune was a revolutionary government that ruled Paris for two months in 1871. Following France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the Commune

Avoiding explanations grounded in politics or economics, Hippolyte Taine's *Origins of Contemporary France*, the forerunner of all later works of crowd theory, charged the violent actions of the French working classes, both at the time of the 1789 revolution and during the Commune, to the existence of a deeply ingrained mob mentality that made the masses highly susceptible to the manipulations of socialist firebrands. Adopting Spenserian concepts of social evolution to explain the reasons for and the formation of crowd mentality, Taine suggested that the working classes functioned like "primitive" societies. He reasoned, therefore, that popular sovereignty, which he associated with "the democracy of a contentious rabble," is bound to dissolve into violent and arbitrary destruction.¹⁹

Taine's pessimism found its way into most early works of "crowd theory." Though they often purported to be as scientific as the theories of biology, physiology and psychology on which they were modeled, the crowd studies that proliferated in the three decades after the publication of Taine's first volume relied heavily on hyperbole and aphorism for their effect. Among these, Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* was more hyperbolic and aphoristic than the rest.²⁰ It was also the most successful in popularizing its author's startling central argument: While all our ancient beliefs are tottering and disappearing, while the old pillars of society are giving way one by one, the power of the crowd is the only force nothing menaces, and of which the prestige is continually on the increase. The age we are about to enter

reinstated the revolutionary calendar, adopted the red flag of socialism and instituted numerous democratic reforms. In the week before its overthrow, Parisian citizens who supported the Commune took to desperate measures to meet the violence directed at them by the armies of the moderate republican government based in Versailles.

¹⁹ Hippolyte Taine, *Origins of Contemporary France: The French Revolution*, vol. II, trans. John Durand (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1881), 111.

²⁰ Numerous works of crowd psychology were written prior to the publication of Le Bon's book. The most influential direct descendants of Taine's *Origins* were two studies by Gabriel Tarde—*La philosophie pénale* and *Les lois de l'imitation* (both 1890), and Scipio Sighele's *La folla delinquente* (1891). There are also several excellent overviews of early works in crowd psychology. In addition to McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti*, see Susanna Barrows, *Distorting Mirrors, Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) and Christian Borch, *The Politics of Crowds: an Alternative History of Sociology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

will in truth be THE ERA OF CROWDS.²¹

What caught the attention of Europeans across the political spectrum, however, were not Le Bon's descriptions of crowd behavior—similar accounts could be found in newspapers, novels, and plays across Europe in the late nineteenth century—but rather the connections Le Bon made between his ostensibly scientific study of crowds and the techniques of mass manipulation that might be derived from them. Given that all human conduct is rooted in unconscious collective processes, Le Bon reasons that the most effective leaders will be those who have learned to master the non-rational dimensions of crowd behavior. Notably, when he offers one of his more memorable aphorisms—"To know the art of impressing the imagination of crowds is to know at the same time the art of governing them"—it serves as a coda to a discussion of crowds in the theater.²²

Theater played an increasingly important role in the conceptualization of crowd theory as its focus expanded from the politics of the streets to the workings of mass society. Theatrical analogies abound in the work of crowd theorists like Le Bon who saw suggestion, imitation and contagion as the core mechanisms of crowd formation. In a crowd, as in a theater, a person becomes more suggestible and open to being led by his emotions. In the theater, as in a crowd, a person can begin to lose his sense of individuality and begin to imagine himself as a part of a larger collectivity (i.e. the audience). To illustrate the similarities between crowds in the street and spectators in the theater, Le Bon turns to an anecdote:

The story has often been told of the manager of a popular theater who, in consequence of his only playing somber dramas, was obliged to have the actor who took the part of the traitor protected on his leaving the theatre, to defend

²¹ Le Bon, 15. *The Crowd* went through twenty-six printings in France between 1895 and 1920. The English translation was printed sixteen times in England and the United States (until 1926). By then it had been translated into thirteen different languages.

²² *Ibid.*, 58.

against the violence of the spectators, indignant at the crimes, imaginary though they were, which the traitor had committed. We have here, in my opinion, one of the most remarkable indications of the mental state of crowds, and especially of the facility with which they are suggestioned. The unreal has almost as much influence on them as the real. They have an evident tendency not to distinguish between the two.”²³

Although the story Le Bon retells is, by his own admission, an aberration, the fact that he includes it at all, and that it “has often been told,” suggests the extent to which his audience is already familiar with the idea that the popular theater is a place where crowd behavior can and does turn into mob violence.

Despite the propensity of the popular theater to produce suggestible crowds, or paradoxically *because* of it, theatrical illusions and representations offer useful instruction for the would-be ruler of crowds. “Crowds being only capable of thinking in images,”²⁴ Le Bon writes, “are only to be impressed by images.” He continues:

For this reason, theatrical representations, in which the image is shown in its most clearly visible shape, always have an enormous influence on crowds. Bread and spectacular shows constituted for the plebeians of ancient Rome the ideal of happiness, and they asked for nothing more. Throughout the successive ages this ideal has scarcely varied. Nothing has a greater effect on the imagination of crowds of every category than theatrical representations. The entire audience experiences at the same time the same emotions, and if these emotions are at not once transformed into acts, it is because the most unconscious spectator cannot ignore that he is the victim of illusions and that he has laughed or wept over imaginary adventures.²⁵

The contradictions in the argument Le Bon makes here are hardly uncharacteristic of *The Crowd*. Because crowds go to theaters in order to take part *consciously* and *willingly* in an illusion, Le Bon admits that theater spectators, unlike most of the crowds he studies, are bound to reflect on the experience of the illusion in such a way that irrational acts will not automatically ensue.

²³ Ibid., 55.

²⁴ Ibid., 54.

²⁵ Ibid., 54-55.

Moreover, his choice of ancient Rome as an example demonstrates not that theatrical images prompt action, but that they prompt passivity. Regardless of the inconsistencies, what matters here to an understanding of the complex motivations leading to the development of mass pageantry in the early twentieth century is Le Bon's clear endorsement of theatrical representation as a potentially powerful mechanism of social control. Whether for good or for ill, the early twentieth-century mass pageants come into being in large part because there already exists in the late nineteenth century a widespread understanding of theater as an art form uniquely capable of reaching and working on unconscious collective processes.

Drawing on theatrical analogies and scenes of literature to explain social behavior was a common practice of early crowd theorists, and one which Émile Durkheim strongly rejected as non-scientific. In fact, Durkheim rejected all of early crowd theory as utter nonsense damaging to the development of sociology as a scientific discipline.²⁶ However, Christian Borch has recently shown that Durkheim “eventually and quite surprisingly opened up new avenues for understanding crowd behavior. Or to be more precise, without admitting it, he ended up confirming and reinterpreting many of the insights of the crowd theories of Le Bon and Tarde.”²⁷ Durkheim's well-known description of an Australian *corrobory* in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) is useful for comparing his perspective on “collective sentiment” with Le Bon's:

When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions; each echoes the others, and is re-echoed by the others. The initial impulse thus proceeds, growing as it goes, as an avalanche grows in its advance. And as such active passions so free from all control could not fail to burst out, on every side one sees nothing but violent gestures, cries,

²⁶ See Christian Borch, 64-70.

²⁷ Borch, 70.

veritable howls, and deafening noises of every sort, which aid in intensifying still more the state of mind which they manifest. And since a collective sentiment cannot express itself collectively except on the condition of observing a certain order permitting co-operation and movements in unison, these gestures and cries naturally tend to become rhythmic and regular; hence come songs and dances.²⁸

For Durkheim, incidences of “collective sentiment” such as these begin in chaos and violence, but gradually adopt a kind of order that regularizes them, developing them into peaceful songs and dances, which continue and increase the intensity of the collective experience. Whereas the collective in Durkheim’s *corrobbori* is one capable of regulating and organizing itself through participatory performance in a ritual, the collective spectator in Le Bon’s popular theater is one doomed to descend from chaos into violence without the intercession of a strong leader. Although Le Bon does grudgingly admit to the possible existence of “virtuous and heroic crowds,” Durkheim’s view of collective illusion is far more generous: “In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion,” he writes, “we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces.”²⁹

Of course, the extent to which one sees Durkheim’s reinterpretation of the crowd as relevant to an understanding of twentieth-century mass pageantry depends upon reconciling Durkheim’s aversion to theatrical metaphor with his own theories of what he called “ritual” and what contemporary scholarship comfortably calls “performance.” In taking on just that project, Philip Smith and Jeffrey Alexander make the case that “Durkheim was not himself insensitive to the fact that rituals have a performative dimension.”³⁰ In particular they point to Durkheim’s definition of church as “a society whose members are united by the fact that they think in the

²⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1915), 215.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁰ Philip Smith and Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Introduction: the New Durkheim,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, eds., Philip Smith and Jeffrey C. Alexander (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26.

same way in regard to the sacred world and its relations to the profane world, and by the fact that they translate these common ideas into common practices.”³¹

Were one to contend, as Durkheim might, that the salient difference between the *corrobbori* and a stage play is that the former is a ritual with a religious purpose while the latter is merely a form of entertainment, P.S. Kogan, head of the Department of Mass Festivals in the years immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, offers an important rebuttal in “The Theater as Tribune” (1920). Naming theater “the great organizer of our time,” Kogan saw theater as a medium through which a social body “illuminates its collective consciousness, sharpens its emotions, and forges its will. It does so even when it seems to be just amusement. Theater always fulfills a social purpose. Its organizational strength is all the more because people believe they are playing a game and not participating in an important social process.”³²

Even were Durkheim to have conceded to Kogan that a *corrobbori* and a stage play both may be said to serve important social purposes, Smith and Alexander suggest that, “No doubt Durkheim was also worried that the theatrical analogy would make symbolic actors seem less sincere and, in this way, undermine his democratic-republican argument that social and political authority can, and should, be sustained by deeply meaningful symbolic action and not primarily by coercive forms of structural power or by debased populist sentiments.”³³ Given a generally accepted view among late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intellectuals that standard fare in the European theater meant either mind-numbing variety entertainments or stock sentimentalism, Durkheim’s hesitation is more than understandable. Without specifically

³¹ Ibid.

³² P.S. Kogan, “Theater as Tribune,” in *Bolshevik Visions*, ed. William Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 440.

³³ Smith and Alexander, 29.

intending to do so Smith and Alexander point to the most important dilemmas presented by the study of early twentieth-century mass pageants. Ought we to examine their potential as “deeply meaningful symbolic actions”? Or would we be wiser to adopt the position that they are “coercive forms of structural power”? Ought we to write off their popularity as expressions of “debased populist sentiment”? Or is it possible to find some value in the experiences of collectivity they offered participants and spectators, even if such experiences had limited reach and even less duration? If we agree with Durkheim that “collective sentiment cannot express itself collectively except on the condition of observing a certain order permitting co-operation and movements in unison,” then how much and what kind of order is necessary to generate collective sentiment? How much is too much? These are not easy questions to address, neither for the artists who created them in the early twentieth century, nor for the scholars who have studied them since. In order to explain my own approach, it will be useful to briefly review the current state of scholarship and to point out, in the process, at what points my study concurs and at what points it departs.

Between Propaganda and Performance

Unlike conventional plays, which in most cases are written to be performed on any stage and in any era, pageants are generally bound to the particular places and moments in which they are performed, usually only once and for a particular occasion. As such, the majority of current scholarship concerning mass pageants treats them primarily as cultural-historical texts and only in a limited way as theatrical performances. This “anthropological” approach to the study of mass political performance in the twentieth century originates in the influential work of George Mosse. In *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (1975), Mosse departed from the

work of his contemporaries by analyzing the elements of myth, symbolism, ritual and liturgy in political events rather than the content of political documents. Concerned as he was with “the dignity of the individual and its challengers, so successful during long periods of our century in stripping man of control over his destiny,” Mosse explained that his methods arose from his conviction that “the development of mass movements and mass politics [in the nineteenth century] seemed to transform the political process itself into a drama which further diminished the individual whose conscious actions might change the course of his own destiny.”³⁴ The congruence here between Mosse’s view that the individual is diminished when politics becomes a matter of performance and Durkheim’s doubts about theater’s ability to create authentic collective rituals ought not to be missed. It explains in part why the artists who make minor appearances in Mosse’s book either fail in their experiments in collective performance, like Ernst Toller, because their works do not sufficiently resonate with the working classes, or they succeed too well, like Mary Wigman, because the collective performances they design earn praise from demagogues for their propagandistic value.³⁵ In either case, the underlying assumption in much of Mosse’s book is that the truest forms of artistic expression are those that raise the individual above collective life; to weigh down literature, art and theater, “with the pressure of the world” leads only to “stifling artistic creativity and transforming it into political documentation.”³⁶

As Jeffrey Schnapp cogently explains in *Staging Fascism*, the “top-down, unified perspective” on Nazi and Fascist cultures pioneered by Mosse and other “consensus-oriented historians” corrected earlier views of the regimes they supported as historical aberrations during

³⁴ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbols and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), vii.

³⁵ See Mosse, 155-176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

which the mass of citizens was held captive by a barbaric minority. It also helped to explain how such regimes could have been sustained over the course of decades. Unfortunately, the “necessary privileging of matters of governmental policy” entailed by these approaches led to an over-emphasis on the ways in which myth-making events and symbolic displays shaped the masses, and to a consequent lack of attention to the ways in which “shaping efforts were themselves practically and imaginatively shaped and deflected by individuals, groups and broader historical forces.”³⁷ In attempting to explain with specificity the complex propagandistic operations of cultural forms, Mosse and his contemporaries end up reducing them “to the role of documentation confirming or confuting the intent of a given policy initiative.”³⁸

The generation of scholars following Mosse and his contemporaries all agree on one point: that the concept of “propaganda” does not sufficiently explain the aims and the impact of mass pageants, spectacles and festivals and that, therefore, more complex approaches are required to analyze them. David Glassberg, James von Geldern and Jeffrey Schnapp analyze their respective subjects (American pageantry, Bolshevik festivals, and Fascist mass spectacles) using a broad range of methodological tools drawn from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology and history. In addition to political documents of the period, they examine archival sources concerning the creative, technical and bureaucratic processes involved in the production of pageants and spectacles and they strive to understand how such events were received by examining contemporary responses. In looking beyond the official meanings attributed to such events by civic and political leaders, Glassberg, von Geldern and Schnapp reveal the multiple and often contradictory ways in which mass pageants both shaped and reflected political life.

³⁷ Schnapp, 10-11.

³⁸ Ibid. Schnapp points to the work of Renzo de Felice and Victoria de Grazia as other models of “consensus-oriented” history.

Although David Glassberg directly cites Mosse's *Nationalization of the Masses* to claim that "more than any other civic celebration in America, the *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* self-consciously attempted to manipulate the emotions of the crowd on a scale comparable only to Wagnerian opera in Germany," he recognizes that it was often the scale of American pageant performances that prevented them from serving as useful instruments of propaganda.³⁹ The complex negotiations among competing interests required to stage a pageant meant that ultimately they "could not bear the weight of expectation placed upon them by various groups."⁴⁰ In a similar vein, James von Geldern claims in *Bolshevik Festivals* that although the primary purpose of the mass festivals from the perspective of those holding the purse-strings was entirely propagandistic, the interaction between spectators, performers and artists was "idiosyncratic, fluid, elusive; propaganda rarely conveyed a single message but offered potential messages on many levels."⁴¹ For Jeffrey Schnapp in *Staging Fascism*, mass spectacles like *18BL* are simultaneously much more and much less than propaganda. On one hand they encompass more than the word usually implies because they aim not only to stage compelling political ideas, but also to transform "every area of human activity from work to leisure, from politics to ethics to individual psychology to regimes of bodily hygiene and exercise."⁴² On the other hand, the staggering failure of *18BL* to gain any kind of approbation (critical, popular or official) means that rather than thinking about such works as successful tools of political manipulation, as Mosse does, it may be more critical to consider the implications of their "conceptual fissures and blind

³⁹ Glassberg, 199.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 286.

⁴¹ von Geldern, 10.

⁴² Schnapp, 2-4.

spots.”⁴³

Like Jeffrey Schnapp in *Staging Fascism*, Glassberg and von Geldern in their respective works on American pageants and Bolshevik festivals treat the relationship between politics and aesthetics as a shifting one marked by conceptual gaps, misunderstandings and overblown expectations. However, while Glassberg and von Geldern cast a wide net, discussing dozens of pageants in order to arrive at general conclusions about the ways in which they reflect their sociopolitical circumstances, Schnapp offers a micro-historical and micro-cultural study of just one spectacle, *18BL*, which was the featured event of Rome’s 1934 youth Olympics of art and culture. The great value of Schnapp’s sustained engagement with one spectacle (and thus the source of its influence on the structure and method of the present work) is that its rich, multi-layered interpretation of *18BL* is built on an analysis of performance details that expose the spectacle’s attempt to negotiate the conflicting demands of political ideology, artistic innovation and widespread social and cultural reform. Schnapp’s *Staging Fascism* delves into the “imaginative world” constructed by the pageant because, as Hal Foster asserts in the foreword to *18BL*, “imaginary worlds serve as imaginary resolutions of real contradictions. Their resolutions are never merely imaginary nor fully resolved.”⁴⁴

So markedly different in its scope, its approaches and its conclusions from the works of scholarship just discussed that it requires more detailed explanation is Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (2005). Although Fischer-Lichte devotes only one-third of the study to an examination of what she terms “interwar mass spectacles,” and although her discussion of these spectacles primarily informs a wider analytical arc concerning the meaning and function of sacrifice in twentieth-century performance theory

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Hal Foster, “Foreword,” in Schnapp, xiii-xviii, xvi.

and practice, her book stands out not only for its imaginative interpretation of the spectacles, but for two other reasons as well. First, it is the only existing work of scholarship, as far as I am aware, to analyze mass spectacles in a transnational context: in particular it considers Bolshevik spectacles, *Thingspiel* performances, and what Fischer-Lichte calls “American Zionist pageants.”⁴⁵ Second, it does so by focusing primarily on the theories and practices of those who advocated for and created mass theater and only secondarily on matters of political ideology.

Fischer-Lichte’s interest in the transnational dimensions of interwar mass spectacles leads her to ask questions similar to my own about why these events would have occurred in different countries in the early decades of the twentieth century. She writes: It has often been suggested that mass spectacles were invented by totalitarian states in order to manipulate the masses. However, I shall propose instead that the mass spectacle originated in a deep yearning for communal experience widespread in European culture at the turn of the century which stimulated the exploration of different kinds of fusion between theater and ritual.⁴⁶ Like the other scholars I have discussed here, Fischer-Lichte argues that spectacles cannot be dismissed as simple propaganda. Unlike the others, however, her explanation for their emergence in this period is not rooted in specifically political concerns.

In Fischer-Lichte’s view, it is the concept of theater as a festival, widespread at the turn of the century, which spurs an interest in the creation of the “people’s theater” projects out of which the mass spectacles developed. This argument finds convincing support in the words of twentieth-century theater theorists and practitioners, many of whom were influenced by the

⁴⁵ See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 160. Fischer-Lichte refers to three pageants initiated by Meyer Weisgal who worked in the Chicago office of the Zionist Organization of America. These were *Israel Reborn* (1932), *The Romance of a People* (1933) and *The Eternal Road* (1937). Although these pageants fall squarely within the American pageant movement, Fischer-Lichte does not analyze them within that tradition, but rather as a form of “interwar mass spectacle” akin to the other spectacles she discusses: Bolshevik pageants and Nazi-era *Thingspiele*.

⁴⁶ Fischer-Lichte, 90.

writings of Richard Wagner. Wagner's picture of the nineteenth-century stage as a locus of corruption, commercialism and vapid bourgeois chatter was shared by many artists and intellectuals of the era. In both theory and practice, reformers sought to reclaim the theater as a place where true art might flourish and where artists might be able to develop their craft without being forced to pander to the desires of bourgeois audiences. Although few theater reformers shared Wagner's views concerning politics, race and revolution, they nevertheless agreed with Wagner that reversing the decline of theatrical art meant fundamentally transforming relations between "art" and "the people." Despite the fact that reformers advocated different concepts of festival, Fischer-Lichte maintains that they all agreed "on the communal experience opened up by the festival. In a festival, there is no separation between actors and spectators; those who arrive as spectators are transformed into participants, and together they form a community."⁴⁷

Fischer-Lichte's discussion of the aspirations of those who advocated for the idea of theatre as a festival, for the idea of the people's theater, and for the necessity of participatory mass pageants, is sound and convincing. Just as they believed that theatrical expression could not easily be separated from religious feeling or ceremony, theater reformers did not believe that it ought to be separate from the work of the state. The natural human instincts to which the art of theater appealed—to congregate, to perform, to pretend, and to dress up—were, they believed, akin to those from which religion and the state had developed. European and American pageant-devisers inherited from Richard Wagner a longing to invest their work with the spirit of the people, as well as a passionate commitment to continuing Wagner's innovations in stagecraft, dramaturgy and orchestration of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Although they were forced to temper somewhat their visions of collective ecstasy in order to achieve the support of political and civic authorities, the Nietzscheans among them (notably Vyacheslav Ivanov and Georg Fuchs)

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

genuinely hoped to see performers and participants “united in one mystic community.”⁴⁸ Nearly all would have told Durkheim that what he meant by ritual was precisely what they believed theater already to be, and very likely all would have agreed with Durkheim that they lived in a period of history when the alienating effects of modern labor practices were at the root of the problem of social disintegration.

In an era marked by the rapid rise of Socialist movements, escalations in strike activities, increasing labor shortages, and the spread of trade unions, the emergence of mass pageantry reflected a complex array of responses to what would have been referred to by supporters as “the labor movement” and by detractors as “the labor question.” Proponents of mass pageants claimed that the inherently collective art of theater was uniquely suited to the task of overcoming various manifestations of alienation in the domain of work as long as it directly involved workers in the processes of production and performance. Some believed that pageants would help to raise the class consciousness of workers while others believed that they would reduce labor conflicts by bringing all classes together in pursuit of a common goal. Pageants would provide healthy leisure activities for workers whose moral, civic, spiritual and aesthetic sensibilities had been dulled, if not entirely obliterated, by oppressive labor conditions and they would prepare the way for a true “people’s theater” in which workers themselves would become skilled playwrights, performers and directors. Whether they participated in production processes, in performances or as spectators, workers would be rejuvenated by their experiences and ready to return to their work with a greater sense of purpose. Finally, pageants would offer workers opportunities to practice and perform displays of efficient mass organization that could ideally be reproduced in both civic and industrial settings.

All of this is in keeping with Fischer-Lichte’s argument that pageants and spectacles

⁴⁸ Ibid., 100.

emerged in response to a “yearning for communal experience.” That some kind of desire to merge with the masses—and to lift them up—was felt by early twentieth-century pageant-devisers I do not dispute; however, I argue throughout this dissertation that this longing went hand in hand with an equally strong determination to instruct, control and transform the masses. While Fischer-Lichte’s explicit preference for phenomenological analysis and her outright rejection of questions of representation is presumably a reaction against the prevailing modes of inquiry that have characterized the study of mass pageants from the late twentieth century to the present, it is also unfortunately this critical perspective that causes her study of them to glide past the pageants’ most peculiar and troubling contradictions.

Having staked her claim that interwar mass spectacles emerged primarily from a widespread “yearning for communal experience,” Fischer-Lichte uses the pioneering work of the German theater scholar Max Herrmann (1865-1942) to authorize two claims that lend support to her method. The first presumes a correspondence between “aesthetic experience” and “communal experience”:

For the aesthetic experience to occur during the performance, the most important theatrical aspect is the shared lived experience of real bodies and real spaces. The activity of the spectator is understood not only as an activity of the imagination, as it may appear at first glance, nor as a production of meaning, i.e. as a cognitive process. Rather it is conceived, as a physical process, set in motion by participating in the event, by perceiving not only through the eyes and the ears, but through bodily sensations which affect the whole body.⁴⁹

The second claim, consistent with all late twentieth-century theories of performativity, is that “performative acts/performances do not express something that pre-exists, something given.

[Rather] they bring forth something that . . . comes into being by way of the performative act/ the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 26.

performance that occurs.”⁵⁰ Because communal/aesthetic experiences are brought forth through the performative act (rather than being predetermined), a successful mass festival, spectacle or pageant, according to Fischer-Lichte, will be one that successfully creates the conditions in which “self-organizing and self-organized communities” arise, even if these are only “theatrical communities” lasting for no longer than the duration of the event.⁵¹ Because, as she claims, the bringing forth of “self-organizing and self-organized communities” in a performance has entirely to do with the shared experience of actors and spectators and nothing at all to do with “the particular reality which is represented on stage, and the possible meanings that could be attributed to the outward appearance of the actors and their actions,” Fischer-Lichte explicitly rejects questions of representation, and instead proposes a strictly phenomenological interpretation of the interwar mass spectacles.⁵² Using a rubric derived from accounts of Max Reinhardt’s *Oedipus Rex* (an unequivocally successful experiment in mass theater first staged in Munich in 1910) Fischer-Lichte proposes the idea that there are at base three devices that define the shared experience of actors and spectators in a mass spectacle, and which determine, therefore, whether or not it was likely to have brought forth a “self-organized and self-organizing community”: “(1) the occupation of space by the masses; (2) the way in which a particular atmosphere functions; (3) the dynamic and energetic bodies moving through the whole space.”⁵³

At the level of the “shared lived experience of real bodies and real spaces,” the emergence of “communities of feeling,” standing apart from any narrative structures imposed by

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵¹ Ibid., 105; 58.

⁵² Ibid., 24.

⁵³ Ibid., 50. *Oedipus Rex* was the first arena production directed by the Berlin director, Max Reinhardt. Performed first in 1910 at the Munich Musikfesthalle and at the Circus Schumann in Berlin, the production toured throughout Europe (including in England and in Russia) between 1910 and 1912.

a pageant, is certainly possible. Unfortunately, in the case of mass pageants, too few first-hand accounts from spectators and participants exist that would corroborate or confirm these kinds of idealized experiences. Moreover, of the first-hand accounts of pageants that do exist, most have to be read skeptically because they were written either by individuals with a vested interest in believing that they had succeeded in creating organic communities, or by politically-motivated nay-sayers who report having witnessed nothing other than grand displays of coercion.⁵⁴ In describing the effect of permanently moving bodies in *Oedipus Rex*, Fischer-Lichte writes:

Spectating literally became a physical activity, not only restricted to the eyes—and the ears—but involving the whole body. . . . [This] activity directed the attention of the spectator to his own body. He became very much aware of the physical impulses triggered by the process of looking on: the physiological, affective, energetic, and motor impulses. He did not follow the actions of the performers in his imagination only, but also physically. In this sense he became bodily involved and this established a bond between him and the performers as well as between him and the other spectators.⁵⁵

Although Fischer-Lichte's description of the transformation this representative spectator-participant undergoes may indeed be correct, no evidentiary basis exists to judge the extent of its accuracy. Although she admits that not everyone may have felt part of a communal/aesthetic experience, she nevertheless claims to be certain that this performance brought forth a "kind of community" and produced a "bond of sorts."⁵⁶ This is not to claim that it is impossible to access elements of experience by adopting what Bert States calls a "phenomenological attitude" towards the pageants; rather, it is to suggest that the use of phenomenological analysis with respect to mass pageants requires a measure of skepticism and a thorough sifting of the numerous biases

⁵⁴ The widely published account of *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (Petrograd, 1920) by the British socialist Huntly Carter is a good example of the former tendency. See Carter's *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre* (Brentano, 1929), 143-48. The anarchist Emma Goldman's account of the same pageant serves as an example of the latter. See *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, 1923), 67-73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

and contradictions that inevitably arise.⁵⁷

Even if phenomenological analysis did not present such obstacles in the case of mass pageants, it is unclear why Fischer-Lichte takes such pains to prove that it is so far superior to semiotic analysis, especially because it would seem that semiotic and phenomenological approaches might with good reason be employed in concert. Another moment in her analysis of Reinhardt's *Oedipus Rex* demonstrates this point. She writes: The occupation of the whole space by the performers . . . cancelled the difference between performers and spectators. The performers moved among the spectators, they seemed to be one with them. Thus they drew the spectators into the action and made it difficult to distinguish between actors and spectators. All together they formed one mass.⁵⁸ The occupation of space Fischer-Lichte describes might as easily have been experienced as invasion rather than as unification. It could have served, in fact, to heighten rather than reduce the difference between performers and spectators. My point, however, is not that Fischer-Lichte's analysis is either valid or invalid; rather, my point is that a better understanding of the context of this performative moment, which would necessarily include issues of representation, might aid in a fuller understanding of the multiple meanings it may have had for a range of performers and participants. Moreover, it is entirely possible to interpret this moment not as (or not only as) an *actual* collapsing of the boundary between actors and spectators, but as a *sign* of that boundary breaking down. Thus the moment becomes one that not only generates communal experience, but one that also, potentially, makes an argument about how collectivity ought to be understood: as an erasure of difference.

Attempts to imagine, reconstruct and analyze what spectators and participants may have

⁵⁷ See Bert States, "The Phenomenological Attitude" in *Critical Theory and Performance*, Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach, eds. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 26-36.

⁵⁸ Fischer-Lichte, 51.

experienced allows us to peel away the layers of historical context in which pageants are embedded and, in the process, free them from the interpretive structures such contexts often impose. Rather than limiting our set of analytical tools to those that encompass the historical, political, and social conditions we do not share with pageant performers and participants, they allow us to use what we do share with them—bodily experiences of collectivity—as critical tools. However, we risk misunderstanding the complex realities that conditioned and mediated these experiences if we do not also take questions of representation seriously. Stories—all the things they may mean and all the ways they may mean—are, in at least a general sense, important to anyone going to see or to take part in any kind of performance. In the case of the mass pageants, this is even more so because in every instance the story being told also presents itself as a story about the people watching and performing in the pageant, about their ancestors, and about the places in which they live and work. How this story is constructed, organized and staged is therefore central to the purpose of the mass pageants, not only for those who created them, but for those to whom they purportedly belonged: the inhabitants of the cities, towns and villages in which pageants were performed. Where such stories find acceptance, where they are rejected or transformed, and what they tell us about the possibilities and limitations of collective experience in their particular places and times, strike me as crucial questions to ask if we hope to clarify continuing debates about theater's ability to create, support and transform communities. Moreover, in the case of the early twentieth-century mass pageants, it was through the mass production and circulation of numerous representations of the event (in newspaper articles, souvenirs, photographs, and films) that pageants often had their greatest impact. The many texts and images produced by pageants, combined with their widespread dissemination meant that the efficacy of pageants was directly tied to their capacity to represent idealized versions of

collective life *as well as* their ability to generate authentic communal experiences.

Pageants do not merely authorize communities. They claim an unambiguous correspondence between mass actor, mass character, and mass spectator, which allows them to generate performative arguments about how “we” ought to be—about what kinds of collectivities are acceptable, or desirable, and which are not. What modes of communal organization should we revive or invent in order to ensure the strength of the social order? Who ought to be included or made central to this social order. Who should be excluded or marginalized? What kinds of collective labor practices will secure peace and prosperity? What forms of collective action should we practice in order to make our society more natural, more real, more civilized, more cohesive, more efficient, more adaptive or more modern? What habits of collective spectatorship and participation should we cultivate in order to guarantee that theater does not become irrelevant to daily life, but rather points the way forward to the creation of more unified, enlightened and rational societies? These are all questions to which the mass pageants deliberately aimed to provide answers.

Apart from general questions about the validity of claims based on the imaginative phenomenological analysis of mass pageants, and their inseparability from claims based on semiotic analysis, the larger difficulty presented by Fischer-Lichte’s study of the pageants is that a combination of claims about what pageant participants and spectators must have experienced, with a three-point rubric designed to support the validity of those claims, leads to the impression that it is possible to determine *a priori*, and apart from any other context, whether a pageant is likely to succeed or fail in generating “self-organizing and self-organized communities.” Moreover, it too neatly reinforces Fischer-Lichte’s initial assumption that this was indeed their primary motivation. In properly resisting the idea of these events as little more than propaganda,

she ends up over-valuing their emancipatory potential and missing that element of authoritarianism in the pageants that rests not with the politicians, but with the artists themselves.

Making New Theaters for the People and Peoples for the New Theater

Recognizing as early as 1902 that the impulses leading to the creation of “people’s theater” movements were an odd combination of the paternalistic, the revolutionary, the pragmatic and the utopian, Romain Rolland wrote the following in *The People’s Theater*, a work widely read by pageant-devisers across Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century:

French artists have, of course, known of the existence of the people before, but they have considered them only as subjects of conversation, as material for novels, plays or pictures . . . But they never took the people into account as a living entity, a public or a judge. The progress of Socialism has directed the attention of artists to this new sovereign whose politicians up to the present had been its sole spokesmen: authors and actors. And they have discovered the people—discovered, I venture to say, in much the same manner as explorers discover a new market for their wares. The authors wish to import their plays, the State its repertory, actors, and officials. It is a comedy in itself, with a part for each. This is not a fit subject for irony, for no one is quite exempt from its shafts. And we must take men as they are, nor seek to discourage their conscious or unconscious efforts to combine personal with public gain—provided the latter is assured.⁵⁹

Rolland recognizes that to whatever extent people’s theater advocates may have been driven by the desire to restore social bonds, to right the wrongs brought on by capitalism and industrial labor, and to generate authentic communal experiences, it ought not to be forgotten that they were also theater artists searching for new audiences at a time when the rapid expansion of mass

⁵⁹ Romain Rolland, *The People’s Theater*, trans. Barrett H. Clark (New York: Holt, 1918), 3-4. The term “people’s theater” is broadly applicable to any theater movement or style that seeks to reach working class audiences. People’s theater projects were an integral part of reform movements throughout Europe and the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The leading figure of the people’s theater movement in France to which Rolland refers was Maurice Pottecher, whose People’s Theater of Bussang (Vosges) produced folk plays with a non-professional company of actors between 1895 and 1955. See David James Fisher, “The Origins of the French Popular Theatre,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 12, no. 3 (Jul 1977), 461-497; and Maurice Edgar Coindreau, “Les Tentatives de Théâtre Populaire en France de 1900 à 1925,” *The French Review*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Feb 1933), 181-189.

culture was threatening to diminish, or even extinguish, whatever interest popular audiences had in attending theatrical performances. The “people’s theater” is only partly an idea about serving the people; it is also a means by which theater performs its status as a necessary social and cultural institution.

If pageant-devisers propagandized on behalf of any big idea, it was that theater would have to surpass the bounds of the stage if it were to continue to be a dominant artistic form in the twentieth century. Pageants gave theatrical reformers the opportunity to challenge the prevailing theatrical practices of both the high (bourgeois) and low (popular) commercial forms of theater, and thereby begin to make room for the new, non-commercial forms, practices and methods that they believed should and would dominate the new century. The “third theater” they imagined would be neither elitist, nor populist, but interclass. It would bring actors and spectators into closer contact, but would carefully control any interaction between them, and would never permit the boundary between them to disappear entirely. It would aim to escape both the abnormal psychology of the bourgeois stage and the hackneyed sentimentality of the popular stage by moving theater entirely off of the stage and into outdoor places of public gathering where, in the words of open-air theater advocate, Sheldon Cheney, “the deadening conventions and artificial trappings that have so long burdened dramatic art” would be stripped away.⁶⁰

In order to achieve their visions of the theater of the future, pageant-devisers believed that they would have to “play the crowd,” along with the thousands of amateur performers whose participation they engaged. To attract audiences on the scale they imagined, they would have to go beyond the static tableaux of nineteenth-century public celebrations, finding new ways to translate the energy and variety associated with modern crowds into new versions of “the people.” Percy MacKaye’s explanation that his 1914 *Masque of St. Louis* “technically expresses

⁶⁰ Sheldon Cheney, *The Open-air Theatre* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1918), 8.

its theme by means of a few large rhythmic mass-movements of onward urge, opposition, recoil, and again the sweep onward towards its alluring goal of an harmonious socialized state of human society” was echoed only five years later by P.S. Kogan, who saw the impetus for the development of mass pageantry in the new Soviet Russia in the “great sweep of our Revolution, which has awakened in the broad masses a thirst to recognize themselves as a great, united whole.”⁶¹

On one hand, pageant-devisers saw themselves as servants of the people: Percy MacKaye (*The Masque of St. Louis*) called himself a “dramatist of the multitude,” while Adrian Piotrovsky (*Towards a World Commune*) spoke of the people of Petrograd as his “patron.”⁶² On the other hand, the response of most pageant-devisers to the question proposed by American pageant advocate Richard E. Burton, “Must we give the people what they want?” was uncompromising: “We give the people what they want, so long as they want what they should have.”⁶³ Piotrovsky saw the masses as victims of “the philistinism of the last century, which . . . substituted commerce for art so that ordering a piece of art became a matter of buying a readymade” while MacKaye grumbled that “the dramatist and actors of the theater are largely a product of their audience, and their audience is largely the product of an age-long policy of commercial catering.”⁶⁴ Louis Napoleon Parker, deviser of the 1905 *Sherborne Pageant*, believed pageants should pull audiences out from under “long years of repression, under the tyranny of the genteel,

⁶¹ Percy MacKaye, *Saint Louis: A Civic Masque* (New York: Doubleday, 1914), xiii-xiv; Kogan, 440.

⁶² MacKaye, quoted in Hiram Kelly Moderwell, “The playwright who has the largest audiences.” *New York Times* (19 Dec 1915), X9; Adrian Piotrovsky, quoted in Katerina Clark *Petersburg, Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1995), 137-38.

⁶³ Richard E. Burton, quoted in “No Other American City Ever Planned a Pageant on the Scale of St. Louis,” in the Percy MacKaye Papers, Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College (hereafter PMK Papers).

⁶⁴ Adrian Piotrovsky, quoted in Clark, 138; Percy MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre in Relation to the Redemption of Leisure* (New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1912), 158.

and the thralldom of push and advertisement” that had left their imaginations incapacitated.⁶⁵

Like their intellectual contemporaries, pageant-devisers evinced a profound concern that the spread of commercial culture would further distort the already corrupted aesthetic sensibilities of the masses. Those products of mass culture most likely to impinge on the integrity and innocence of theatrical art—vaudeville, operettas, commercial spectacles of the kind seen at fairs and expositions, cabaret acts, and boulevard melodramas—came in for particular scorn. Indeed, pageant-devisers frequently voiced their opposition to whatever kind of popular performances appealed to the uncultured majority, i.e. the crowd. Consequently, in order to lure crowds away from what they believed to be the fragmentary, disposable and passive experiences offered by popular (and primarily urban) forms of performance, pageants would “play the crowd” in yet another way. They would attempt to convince participants and spectators that the versions of communal life they produced were in fact authentic expressions of their own latent, unconscious, collective desires. However much pageant-devisers may have eagerly sought experiences of “collective effervescence” like Durkheim, like Le Bon they also saw the theater as a potential site of rehabilitation, where the crowd’s basest instincts might be re-educated. In the story of the early twentieth-century mass pageants, no bright line exists between mass manipulation and authentic communal experience. Rather, as the following chapters aim to demonstrate, it is the paradoxical nature of the crowd that pulls them simultaneously in both directions.

“Pageant” contra “Spectacle”

The complex web of circumstances and influences that contributed to the development of the theatrical events I discuss in the present work makes it difficult, at first, to see what they have in common beyond the fact that they were produced on an enormous scale. Moreover, the term

⁶⁵ Louis Napoleon Parker, “Historical Pageants” in *Journal of the Society of the Arts*, vol. 54 (22 Dec 1905), 143.

most often used to describe the events that were produced in the interwar period in Russia, Germany and Italy is “mass spectacle,” not “mass pageant.” Of course, it is neither the case that “pageants” in Great Britain and the United States suddenly disappeared when the First World War began, nor that “mass spectacles” in Central and Eastern Europe took their place after it was over. Though she does not directly address the issue, Erika Fischer-Lichte appears to recognize that the two terms are essentially synonymous. In the section of *Theater, Sacrifice, Ritual* that is devoted to an analysis of the “interwar mass spectacles” she includes the 1933 Chicago pageant, *The Romance of a People*. In fact, there seems no obvious reason why “mass pageants” and “mass spectacles” should be thought of as different kinds of theatrical events.

Though it might be sufficient, therefore, to use “mass pageant” and “mass spectacle” interchangeably, “mass pageant” is the more specific of the two with respect to the events I analyze in the following chapters. “Mass spectacle” accurately describes any number of events which have in common only that they emphasize visual modes of storytelling more than others, and that they are designed with immensity in mind. However, as I will presently demonstrate, the “mass pageant” has particular functions and a particular genealogy that sets it apart from other species of spectacle. Moreover, it is a term that takes into account the fact that many pageant-devisers specifically constructed their idea of “pageants” (or *misterii*, or *Thingspiele*) *against* the notion of spectacle, in many cases taking pains to demonstrate that their pageants surpassed the commercial spectacles available to the mass of citizens. In the speeches and writings of pageant-devisers, the word “spectacle” (and its cognates) frequently stands for isolating, passive, and fragmentary entertainments that serve no other purpose than to degrade the social and aesthetic sensibilities of the masses. A “pageant,” by contrast, bends the attention of the easily distracted masses away from the diversions of mass culture and re-focuses it on performances of

themselves as a whole “people.”

Put simply, my use of the term “mass pageant” discloses the intent to introduce a new conceptual framework for discussing these events—one that identifies tensions between modernity and tradition, between popular culture and high culture, and between theater and civic ritual. In doing so, it invites readers to set aside whatever tangled set of associations they may have with the word “spectacle” and look at these events anew. However, I also aim beyond defamiliarization towards a more accurate understanding of their generic features.

The “mass” of the “mass pageant” needs little elaboration other than to point out that the massive scale of the pageants does not by itself constitute a significant point of commonality between them. Rather, it is a crucial element in their ability to assert themselves as legitimate representations of the whole of “the people.” More importantly, a “mass” pageant, by comparison with other kinds of pageants, takes “the masses” as its protagonist and depends upon “the masses” as the primary source of its creative labor.

“Pageant” requires more consideration for several reasons. First, it is a word that has accumulated numerous, vague definitions over the course of several centuries. Reflecting on the recent popularity of the “new pageantry” in England and the United States, Robert Withington, author of the hefty two-volume *English Historical Pageantry: An Outline* (1918), complained, “It is to be regretted that an already overworked word is forced to stagger under a new load. Since it has not for a long time been used exactly, it cannot be exactly defined.”⁶⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms this to be the case, demonstrating that the word has accrued forty-three different senses and definitions over the course of more than six centuries, and that none of the five or six possible explanations of its etymology are convincing enough to be widely

⁶⁶ Robert Withington, *English Pageantry, an Historical Outline*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1920), xix.

accepted.⁶⁷ Second, pageant” has also for nearly four centuries been used figuratively to mean “something empty or insubstantial; a delusion; a specious display or tribute.”⁶⁸ For this, Shakespeare’s Prospero is only partly to blame.⁶⁹ For all these reasons, the word “pageant” is not an obvious choice for anyone wishing either to clarify the meaning and purpose of these events or to insist that they be taken seriously as subjects of scholarly interest.

An issue of even greater consequence with respect to the present work is that because “pageant” has no cognates in other languages, twentieth-century mass pageants have only been referred to as such in predominantly English-speaking countries. Throughout most of Europe, similar events have been referred to by two- and three-word phrases involving some combination of “festival,” “spectacle,” “play,” “history,” “folk,” “mass” and “people.” Accordingly, one finds references to “historical folk plays,” “popular mass festivals,” “mass historical spectacles” and so on. One must also account for a host of local and regional terms that prove more difficult to translate into English with any exactness: terms such as *deistvo* and *Thingspiel* are two examples.

Despite the very different terms they used to describe these events, early twentieth-century pageant-advocates were well aware that they shared methods, practices and principles with their counterparts in other countries. The Russian theater critic and theorist, Platon Kerzhentsev, who suggested American and British pageants as models for Bolshevik pageants, was not alone in wanting to appropriate the best techniques of other pageant-devisers for the new

⁶⁷ “pageant, n. and adj.,” OED Online (accessed May 10, 2013).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “These our actors / (As I foretold you) were all spirits, and / Are melted into air, into thin air, / And like the baseless fabric of this vision, / The cloud-capp'd tow’rs, the gorgeous palaces, / The solemn temples, the great globe itself, / Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, / And like this insubstantial pageant faded / Leave not a rack behind.” *The Tempest*, IV. i, 148-156. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1630.

kind of mass theater he imagined.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the obligation to demonstrate that mass pageants were clearly linked to native traditions, and therefore not “borrowed” from foreign sources, displaced any latent intent they may have had to contribute to the development of an explicitly new and specifically transnational theatrical genre. Consequently, pageant-advocates took great pains to articulate the connections between the new “pageants” and their various medieval and early modern predecessors.

Although scholars like Erika Fischer-Lichte have only recently begun to consider twentieth-century mass spectacles in transnational perspectives, scholars of medieval and early modern Europe have long since considered civic and religious rituals of those periods in trans-regional contexts. As Edward Muir demonstrates in *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, ideas about how to orchestrate and perform such events regularly crossed regional boundaries throughout the early modern period.⁷¹ Whether they went by indigenous terms such as “pageant,” or by cognates of trans-regional terms such as masque, triumph, and entry, the functions they served were far more significant than what precisely they were called.

In *Early English Stages* (1981), Glynne Wickham demonstrates that medieval pageants in England—generally thought of as being associated *either* with religion (as in a pageant that is part of a mystery cycle) *or* with monarchical spectacle—in fact combined religious and secular narratives to a great degree.⁷² Nevertheless, with state suppression of the mystery plays in England in the late sixteenth century, the word increasingly came to be associated with emblematic performances designed to entertain a sovereign or other ruler during a procession in

⁷⁰ Platon Kerzhentsev, *Tvorcheskii Teatr: puti sotsialisticheskogo teatra* (Moskva: Izd-vo Vseros. Tsentral'nogo Iсполnitel'nogo komiteta Sovetov RSK i K. Deputatov, 1919), 43-48.

⁷¹ See Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd Edition. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On medieval civic rituals in Europe see the collection of essays in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, Barbara Hanawalt and Kathryn Reyerson, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

⁷² Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages, 1300-1660* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 123.

his or her honor.⁷³ Although biblical material might be used in the scenes represented, it is the divine right of rulers, rather than the values of a religious community, that the early modern pageant celebrates.

According to historians of early modern English pageantry (from which my usage of the term derives), they have the following features in common: “They involve the presence of the ruler—sovereign or mayor—they utilize public monies of city or guilds, they take place in the public arena, and they celebrate national and civic virtues.”⁷⁴ David Bergeron, author of *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642* (2003), adds that they function “as part of the political discourse of the realm. Pageants celebrate political power even as they confirm such power.”⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Glynne Wickham points out that “The addition of the distinctive prefix ‘pageant’ suggested a special occasion and a spectacular display quite out of the ordinary.” It was associated with “special State or civic functions, with processions and decorated streets, with flags and uniforms, with heraldic blazon and livery, with a sense of occasion.”⁷⁶

All of this, as will become clear in the course of the present work, can also be said of twentieth-century mass pageants. Yet what most informs my analysis is Wickham’s assertion that pageants were associated, “above all with rituals bringing ruler and subject into mystic communion.” He continues, “At the root of the matter [of how pageants came into being] lies the delicate balance of relationships between ruler and subject in mediaeval Europe. . . The starting

⁷³ In early modern England, pageants came to be associated not only with royal rituals, but also with the annual London Lord Mayor’s Show, a symbolic parade honoring the new mayor as he travelled to Westminster to deliver his oath of loyalty to the reigning monarch. See Tracey Hill, *Pageantry and Power: a Cultural History of the Early Modern Lord Mayor’s Show, 1585-1639* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010) and, most recently, Martin Wiggins, *Drama and the Transfer of Power in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁴ David Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642, Revised Edition* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press—Medieval Texts and Renaissance Studies, 2003), 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁶ Wickham, 51-52.

point was the physical manifestation of the ruler's person to the subjects assembled within the capital city.”⁷⁷ What determines the features of any particular pageant, according to both Wickham and Bergeron, is the presentation of the sovereign to his or her subjects and the particular nature of the relationship between them, which it represents. Twentieth-century mass pageants, like their medieval and early modern counterparts, sought to make the bodies of “sovereigns” visible to their subjects, and also aimed to construct, via the work of performance, a particular set of relations between “sovereign” and subjects. The major difference, of course, is that the “sovereign” to be made visible in a twentieth-century mass pageant is no monarch, but the people itself, and what must be articulated is the difference between the crowd (incompetent to rule and unable to be ruled) and the people as an ideal, self-governing sovereign/subject. The problem at the heart of all early twentieth-century mass pageants was, as pageant-deviser Percy MacKaye put it most succinctly, how “to interpret the people to themselves.”⁷⁸

Whether one is speaking of medieval, early modern, or modern pageants, questions concerning how to make the body of the sovereign visible, or how to articulate the relationship between sovereign and subjects, lead to further questions about the role of theater and performance. David Bergeron claims that early modern pageants necessarily imply the work of theater although “they have matters of representation not common with the drama of the public theaters.” He continues:

The pageant stands at the intersection of fiction and reality because it occurs in real time (an actual occasion and real place) and yet evokes a fictional world through emblematic techniques and historical allusion. The presence of the sovereign, for example, blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, the sovereign being a sign moving between the two. Total representation involves the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 52-53.

⁷⁸ Percy MacKaye, quoted in Joyce Kilmer, *Literature in the Making, By Some of its Makers* (New York: Harper, 1917), 319.

real *presentation* of the sovereign and the *representation* of a dramatic fiction.”⁷⁹

Similarly, twentieth-century mass pageants required the participation of actual citizens as performers and spectators and a dramatic narrative intended to teach citizens their history and instruct them in their duties.

In addition to the convergence of ruler and subjects, the word “pageant” also implies symbolism, the representation of fictional locations, mimetic representation of characters (biblical, allegorical, historical and mythological) and stages constructed in places of public gathering.⁸⁰ Like their twentieth-century counterparts, medieval and early modern pageants borrowed their locations from already existing spaces, building onto and adapting the architectural features of major thoroughfares in cities and large towns. Although one of the significant differences between medieval or early modern pageants and modern mass pageants is that the former were processional, while the latter were stationary, for the most part both used increasingly elaborate technologies the more popular they became. Medieval pageants eventually came to involve curtains and triple-level arches, as well as elaborate stage devices like rain clouds, revolving globes and even revolving stages. Similarly, as twentieth-century mass pageants became larger and more complex, they relied more often on extravagant lighting displays, complex telegraph and telephone systems and cinematic projections.

Medieval, early modern and modern mass pageants were elaborate events that could not have been achieved without great cost and considerable organization. However, as David Bergeron explains, by the early seventeenth century they could also not have achieved the

⁷⁹ Bergeron, 7.

⁸⁰ Historians of English pageantry generally agree that there are two events that gave rise to the idea of the “pageant” as a distinct genre of civic ritual performance. The first was Edward I’s riding in 1298, in which the Fishmongers’ procession employed allegory and symbolism. The second was the coronation of Richard II in 1377, which for the first time used a stage for speech.

widespread popularity they enjoyed without the work of the pageant-dramatists who, “with considerable variety and imagination [came] to the task of illustrating the relationship of the sovereign or magistrate to the state.”⁸¹ Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, Thomas Middleton, John Webster and Anthony Munday all were commissioned to write pageants for various royal occasions. Whereas the devisers of modern mass pageants generally received little compensation, but were well-rewarded with prestige and with a wide scope for experimentation, early modern pageant-dramatists, according to Wickham, probably sought pageant-work more to “stave off a visit to the debtor’s prison than for artistic satisfaction.”⁸²

To the disappointment of some early modern dramatists, like Ben Jonson, pageants relied more on visual and aural methods of communication than on speech to convey their meaning.⁸³ Describing the form of a pageant as “something compacted together,” a merging of history, legend and myth into a continuous coherent dramatic narrative, Robert Withington explains that “In pageantry all things are possible. Every element is . . . made to fit the occasion for which it is borrowed.”⁸⁴ Finding little artistic merit in the hodge-podge of aesthetic forms and styles adopted by medieval and early modern pageants, Withington continues, “The pageant is the lowest form of common expression, but it is a form deeply rooted in the heart of the people.”⁸⁵ Yet it was precisely what so many elite practitioners and theorists of drama found objectionable about pageant plays that made them so appealing for early twentieth-century theater reformers—their capacity to adapt themselves to any artistic style, their independence from the written word, their

⁸¹ Bergeron, 287.

⁸² Wickham, 156.

⁸³ Bergeron, 236.

⁸⁴ Withington, 165.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xx.

use of elaborate technologies, their association with grand national themes, and above all their romantic associations with the life of “the common people.”

The Plan of the Present Work

I begin each chapter by discussing the occasion for a particular pageant and by presenting a brief synthetic overview of the event’s broader social, political and cultural contexts. I then analyze numerous aspects of the creation, production and performance of pageants in order to understand the ways in which they reflected and intervened in contemporary debates about what ought to constitute collective life and how it ought to be transformed. I ask what meaning and purpose the idea of the crowd serves in its particular context, and I ask what alternative visions of collective life are proposed by contemporary theorists and by pageant-devisers, as well as through the performative work of the pageants themselves. I look at representational practices, performance conditions, and institutional demands. I ask how the pageant’s participatory ideal is constituted in theory and in practice, how the organization of labor and the organization of space in a pageant construct paradigms of communal harmony, and what aesthetic influences inform the modes of collective life that are represented onstage. I ask how the formal choices made by the pageant-devisers—choices about acting style, scenography, dialogue, gesture, staging, choreography, use of technology, music, puppetry and iconography—produce social and political meanings, and I ask how such meanings contributed to broader contemporary conversations about the role of theater and performance in the public sphere.

The second chapter, “A Natural History of the Dorset Peasant” examines Louis Napoleon Parker’s *Sherborne Pageant* of 1905—the prototype of the Edwardian pageant, and the event credited with spurring pageantry movements across Great Britain and the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century. Regarded as a fundamentally new form of theater,

Sherborne made a conscious break with earlier English pageant traditions by making “the folk” its protagonist rather than a monarch or civic leader. Taking its inspiration from the anti-industrial utopias imagined by Richard Wagner and William Morris, *Sherborne* aspired to become an authentic art-work of the people, engaging the participation of more than two-thirds of the inhabitants of the small village and drawing an audience of more than 30,000.⁸⁶ Through an analysis of *Sherborne*’s organization, performance and reception, I demonstrate that the pageant’s explicit critique of modernity centered on an implicit distinction between the “folk” (understood as organic, aesthetic, instinctive, and heterogeneous) and the “crowd” (conceived as manufactured, formless, self-conscious, and homogenous). Rather than “killing the modernising spirit” as Parker hoped, I argue that Edwardian pageantry’s anti-modernist posturing contributed directly to its appeal for modern British audiences, which thrived on the spectacle of “contrast crowds” as well as the images such crowds generated in the emerging illustrated press.⁸⁷

Not long after *Sherborne* had created an epidemic of “pageantitis” that spread throughout Great Britain and its former colonies, American visitors summering in England began to wonder why something similar might not be tried on their home continent.⁸⁸ Indeed, pleas for “more pageantry” in American civic and political life can be found alongside American press announcements for *Sherborne*.⁸⁹ Although the first of the new pageants often did little more than imitate their British counterparts, pageant advocates soon founded their own schools, their own university-sponsored degrees and departments, and their own national organization (the

⁸⁶ See Richard Wagner, “The Art-work of the Future” in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works, vol. 1*, trans. Richard Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan Paul, 1895), 196-213.

⁸⁷ Parker, 143.

⁸⁸ Deborah Sugg Ryan, “Pageantitis’: Frank Lascelles’ 1907 *Oxford Historical Pageant*, Visual Spectacle and Popular Memory,” *Visual Culture in Britain*, vol. 8, no. 2 (2007), 63.

⁸⁹ “The Pageant King: Primarily a Boston Man is L. N. Parker. Vogue of Pageants in England—Why Not in America?” *Boston Daily Globe*, 1872-1922 (11 Aug 1907), SM4.

American Pageantry Association). As it grew, the American pageantry movement began to depart significantly from the English model; pageants were often explicitly tied to progressive political causes and, by contrast with Edwardian pageants, were neither anti-modern nor anti-industrial in their biases.

Following the movement of mass pageantry from village to metropolis, the third chapter, “Saint Louis Addresses the Multitude,” concerns the transformation of “crowds” into “publics” in the 1914 *Masque of St. Louis*. Devised by the self-declared symbolist poet and playwright, Percy MacKaye, the *Masque* was performed by over 8,000 residents of St. Louis, Missouri, for more than half a million spectators. Although influenced by Edwardian pageantry, American pageants such as the *Masque* rejected efforts at historical authenticity in favor of what one contemporary critic called a “futuristic” outlook that combined sweeping allegorical narrative with displays of technological brilliance.⁹⁰ Through an analysis of its rich, if bewilderingly elaborate iconography and choreography, I illustrate the ways in which the *Masque* attempted to serve a principal ambition of Progressive Era reformism—to transform primitive, aimless crowds into civilized, modernized publics—while also providing MacKaye and his collaborators with an immense laboratory in which to conduct experiments in narrative form, stagecraft and collective dreaming.

Although the points of contact between prewar English and American pageants, and what are usually referred to as “mass spectacles” of the Soviet era, are not common knowledge, scholars of the latter have been aware of them for some time. This is primarily because one of the most influential works of theater theory published in the wake of the October Revolution, Platon Kerzhentsev’s *Creative Theater* (first edition, 1918), held forth both English and American pageants (including *The Masque of St. Louis*) as models for a new kind of

⁹⁰ Withington, 233.

participatory mass theater that might be ventured in Russia. Claiming that no word in Russian approximates the meaning of the word “pageant,” Kerzhentsev suggested “*theatrical spectacles*, or simply *spectacles*.”⁹¹ As the idea caught on, pageants would be known by many names: *instsenirovki* (adaptations), *deistvi* (ritual dramas), *narodnyi prazdniki* (people’s celebrations), *misterii* (mysteries), *massovyi predstavlenii* (mass shows), and *massovyi narodnyi prazdnestvi* (mass people’s festivals) are but a few variations. Regardless of their designation, directors of the theatrical Left, most of them associates and students of Vsevolod Meyerhold, took up the challenges of the new form. Although they shared with both Parker and MacKaye a Wagnerian orientation towards the idea of theatrical reform as the wellspring of broader social reform, the intensity of their convictions was spurred by the revolutionary culture in which they participated. Whereas English and American pageants preached the ideal of interclass participation, and took on the historical narratives of the places in which they were performed, Soviet pageants addressed their efforts to only one class of citizens (the proletariat) and to only one narrative: the history of working class revolutions and their climax in the October Revolution.

Directed by a cohort of five directors (Konstantin Mardzhanov, Nikolai Petrov, Sergei Radlov, Adrian Piotrovsky, and Vladimir Soloviev), and performed by a cast of 4,000, *Towards a World Commune* (1920) was performed in Petrograd during the period of post-revolutionary crisis commonly referred to as the Civil War. It staged a three-part history of the proletariat—tracing its rise from the ashes of the 1871 Paris Commune, through its period of struggle in the decades leading up to the Great War, to its maturation in the new Bolshevik regime. Central to Soviet pageantry’s conception of the ideal social body during this period was the organized movement of actual massed bodies through the spaces of the city. Like other mass pageants of the period, *Commune* manifested the conviction that a new “Soviet body” (the proletariat) could

⁹¹ Kerzhentsev, 43.

be refashioned from an outworn Russian body (the people) by training the collective reflexes of the populace. Through an analysis of *Commune's* choreography, iconography, mass gestures and technological methods of organization, I demonstrate in the fourth chapter *Commune's* mythical evolution of the Russian mass body from bent-backed “toilers,” to dynamic revolutionary crowds, to an organized, militarized and technologized proletariat.

Reflecting in 1927 on his experiences of directing *Towards a World Commune*, Sergei Radlov recalled his delight at being able to control the movement of the masses using technologies usually reserved for the Red Army. Enthusiasm for the numerous ways in which new technologies promised to transform theater-making may have been what inspired Radlov along with his collaborators—Adrian Piotrovsky in particular—to turn their efforts towards the cinema. To a far greater degree than was possible in the live theater, film put the images of masses of human beings entirely at the disposal of directors. In the early century, filmmakers including Sergei Eisenstein, Fritz Lang and D.W. Griffith experimented with different techniques for filming crowds and different ways of bringing the dynamism of crowds to life on the silent screen.

Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 film *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*) may well be the first film “pageant” made during the era of sound films. Compressing six days of festivity and ceremony connected with the 1934 NSDAP Congress in Nuremberg into a two-hour documentary, *Triumph* won critical acclaim and international awards for its director, Leni Riefenstahl. In the final chapter I argue that, although *Triumph of the Will* is not a mass pageant, interpreting the film through the lens of earlier Weimar pageantry—including Social Democratic pageants, Constitution Day festivities and *Thingspiele*—reveals both the ways in which it reinvents the techniques and strategies of previous spectacles, as well as the ways in which it

uses the camera to mutate the defining characteristic of mass pageantry: that “the people” are represented to themselves. I conclude with some observations on the twenty-first century afterlives of the two concepts which I trace throughout the present work: the idea of the Crowd and the ideal of the mass pageant.

Chapter Two
A Natural History of the Dorset Peasant: The Two Crowds of the *Sherborne Pageant*

Having recently performed the role of Samuel Johnson in the *English Church Pageant* of 1909, G.K. Chesterton might have offered his readers a detailed examination of the peculiar new form of pageantry that had taken hold of the Edwardian imagination only four years earlier. Yet his article in the *Illustrated London News* says next to nothing about the pageant's script, its design or its music, the quality of its acting or even its story. What does warrant considerable attention, however, are the crowds:

[The] truth which the Pageant has to tell the British public is rather more special and curious than one might at first assume. It is easy enough to say in the rough that modern dress is dingy and that the dress of our fathers was more bright and picturesque. But that is not really the point. At Fulham Palace one can compare the huge crowd of people acting in the Pageant with the huge crowd of people looking at it. There is a startling difference, but it is not a mere difference between gaiety and gloom. [. . .] It is not that our age has no appetite for the gay or the gaudy—it is a very hedonistic age. It is not that past ages—even the rich, symbolic Middle Ages—did not feel any sense of safety in what is somber or restrained. A friar in a brown coat is much more severe than 'Arry in a brown bowler. Why is it that he is also much more pleasant? [. . .] The difference is this: that the first man is brown with a reason and the second without a reason. If a hundred monks wore one brown habit it was because they felt that their toil and brotherhood were well expressed in being clad in the coarse, dark colour of the earth. [. . .] But when 'Arry puts on a brown bowler . . . he is not thinking of the brownness of brown. It is not to him a symbol of . . . autochthonous humility; on the contrary, he thinks it looks rather "classy."⁹²

For Edwardian social critics, pageant-going, and even pageant-acting, was an opportunity to study the modern crowd as much as an opportunity to witness English history re-enacted.

Chesterton is a particularly keen observer, and when he trains his eye on the 4,000 performers and 6,000 spectators of the *English Church Pageant*, he finds two crowds—one onstage and one in the grandstands—that seem to him to represent opposing forms of sociality. While pageant performers occupy the leading role of the medieval and early modern "folk," pageant spectators

⁹² G. K. Chesterton, "Our Notebook," *Illustrated London News* (19 June 1909), 180.

unwittingly perform the antagonistic role of the modern crowd.

Chesterton rehearses a conventional argument in order to root out a more essential problematic. The thesis “in the rough” to which he refers, and to which Edwardian pageantry emerged as a direct response, is that London crowds emblemize an alleged lack of aesthetic sense produced by experiences of urban modernity. Like the cities they inhabit, the crowds of London are uniformly dark and dull. Conversely, so the argument continues, the folk of past ages, having evolved from long-lasting ties to land and tradition, possessed an instinctive aesthetic sense that manifested not only in the diversity and color of its dress, but in the design of buildings, the arrangement of towns, the quality of goods, and the harmony of social relations.

Chesterton does not argue against the idea that the English crowds of the past were vastly superior to modern crowds. Like many Victorians and Edwardians, he idealized the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as golden ages of creativity, community and common sense next to which the modern era was but a pale reflection. He argues rather that a comparison of the two species of crowd reveals more than a loss of aesthetic awareness. “The modern trouble,” he says, is a “lack of significance.”⁹³ Although a uniform brown may predominate as often amongst Canterbury monks as among London clerks, Chesterton contends that for the folk of previous centuries, color was symbolic of community and signified that community’s principles. The modern crowd by contrast, represented by a man in a brown bowler, communicates nothing apart from a vague sense of modishness. It is utterly lacking in social consequence.

Chesterton depends on the bowler to articulate his critique of modernity, and, indeed, as an emblem of Edwardian *homo brittanicus*, the bowler was ubiquitous. Economical and easily reproducible, it allowed the wearer to convey a sense of middle-class respectability regardless of his social or economic status. At the same time, the bowler could be an object of derision,

⁹³ Ibid.

signifying the dull uniformity of mass culture or even the repression of impulses towards mob violence. However, the bowler that appears in a photograph from the autobiography of Louis Napoleon Parker, the Edwardian era's premier pageant-deviser—one that has been transformed into a medieval helmet in order to serve as part of a pageant costume—invites us to ask whether the two kinds of crowds Chesterton describes are in fact so distinct from one another and what, moreover, is at stake in maintaining the division (figure 1). For what makes this image extraordinary is not that it depicts a historically accurate rendering of a helmet, but that the invented object at its center is *both* bowler and helmet, and *neither* bowler nor helmet. Erasing the differences between authenticity and artifice, war and fashion, history and modernity, the bowler-helmet is a composite and contingent object that allows us to look both ways across the presumed divide between the crowd onstage and the crowd in the audience: it allows us to see the bowlers in the grandstands as helmets for a different kind of battlefield, and to recognize the helmets onstage as an inseparable link in the genealogy of the modern crowd.

What little scholarship exists on the English pageants of the early twentieth century has tended to rely on contemporary denunciations of modernity made with a high degree of regularity by pageant advocates like Chesterton. Taking these men and women at their word, critics have seen pageants as emerging from a culture that had become “somehow anti-modern, sunk in nostalgia for a world that was lost.”⁹⁴ Seen in this context, pageants provide, at best, insight into the production of a discourse concerning heritage; at worst they project little more than cultural amnesia.⁹⁵ These approaches either affirm pageantry's authenticity by ignoring its theatricality or deride its inauthenticity by pointing to its passion for masquerade. Both tend to

⁹⁴ Bernhard Rieger and Martin Daunt, “Introduction,” *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the late-Victorian Era to World War I* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 5.

⁹⁵ Joshua Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2005), 59.

overlook its productive ambiguity.

More recent works on Edwardian pageantry, however, have recognized greater complexity in pageantry's attempts to mediate problems of modernity such as consumerism, historical knowledge and popular taste.⁹⁶ Efforts to rethink the cultural work of Edwardian pageants are supported by recent studies of British modernity and modernism acknowledging that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "the line between emphatically pro-modern and anti-modern sentiments was not necessarily clear-cut," and, that "the historical impulse and modernization often went hand in hand . . . causing little cognitive dissonance."⁹⁷

One way to explain the appearance of pageantry has been to follow Peter Mandler's assessment of the late Victorian "rural-nostalgic vision of "Englishness" as "the province of impassioned and highly articulate but fairly marginal artistic groups."⁹⁸ According to Mandler, late Victorians had "little need of the origin-myth of Merrie England." Technological advances in image production and telecommunication influenced mass media strategies that in turn "helped to form an audience much more internationalist in its tastes and more "up-to-the-minute."⁹⁹ If, however, pageant advocates were merely "marginalised aesthetes" pleading for the attention of a general populace who rejected their rural-historical fantasies, how does one explain the widespread popularity of pageantry in the period between 1905 and 1914 and its continuation

⁹⁶ See Ayako Yoshino, *The Edwardian Historical Pageant* (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2010) and Meghan Lau, "Performing History: The War-time Pageants of Louis Napoleon Parker," *Modern Drama*, 54:3 (Fall 2011), 265-286. Deborah Sugg Ryan, "Spectacle, the Public, and the Crowd: Exhibitions and Pageants in 1908," in Morna O'Neill and Michael Hatt, eds. *The Edwardian Sense: Art, Design and Performance in Britain, 1901-1910* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 2010).

⁹⁷ Rieger and Dauntton, 8; Peter Mandler, "Against 'Englishness': English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850-1940," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, vol. 7, 1997, 157.

⁹⁸ Mandler, 170.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-61.

into later decades, despite the disruption of two world wars?¹⁰⁰

Through an analysis of the *Sherborne Pageant* of 1905, an event that sparked more than three decades of pageantry in Britain as well as in the United States, and still farther abroad, this chapter demonstrates that Edwardian pageantry's explicit critique of modernity turned on an implicit distinction between the "folk" (organic, aesthetic, instinctive, heterogeneous) and the "crowd" (manufactured, alienated, self-conscious, homogenous). It further demonstrates, however, that pageants such as *Sherborne* necessarily blurred this distinction in practice as often as they asserted its validity in theory. Insofar as pageantry's towns and villages became annual sites for the production, consumption and exchange of English crowds and crowd representations, they succeeded to a degree in alleviating collective anxiety over an alleged loss of authenticity in modern English life. Edwardian pageantry's antimodern posturing is ultimately best understood as a performative strategy for bringing forth new, more flexible forms of collectivity that appealed to both rural and urban moderns.

"Inventing It": The New, Traditional English Pageant

The pageant in which Chesterton performed was one of more than a hundred pageants of its kind performed throughout Great Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century. Although Louis Napoleon Parker had, quite literally, invented the "new pageantry" in the small and virtually unknown Dorset village of Sherborne only four years earlier, by 1909 pageants had become immensely popular (figures 2 and 3).¹⁰¹ Astonished by the swiftness with which

¹⁰⁰ Mandler, 166.

¹⁰¹ That Parker invented the modern English pageant was doubted by no one, including pageant historian Robert Withington who gave the eighth chapter of *English Historical Pageantry, an Outline*, the title of "The Parkerian Pageant." Unlike Parker, Edwardian pageant-devisers were not, in the main, theater professionals. Most were local notables who, though they had some experience on the amateur stage, came to pageant work by dint of their enthusiasm, their social connections and their ability to organize large numbers of people. The most highly regarded pageant-devisers in England before World War II, apart from Parker, were Frank Lascelles, Frank Benson, Gilbert Hudson, Patrick Kirwan, Gwen Lally and Mary Kelly.

pageants had begun to claim the attention of the Edwardian public, some critics dismissively referred to an “epidemic of pageantitis” while others optimistically saw in pageantry’s popularity “a revival of dramatic genius of the common people.”¹⁰² As a direct predecessor of the American pageantry movement that would begin to take shape in 1908 (discussed in Chapter Three), British pageantry played a significant role in the development of transatlantic culture in the twentieth century.¹⁰³

Despite its rapid expansion, however, pageantry in England began on a relatively small scale. Although some, like Chesterton’s *English Church Pageant*, concerned the histories of institutions such as the church, the army, and the Red Cross, the majority of pageants told the histories of the small towns and villages of rural England in which they were performed. In these village pageants, thousands of men and women dressed up as characters from British history and legend and performed massive open air dramas for audiences often numbering in the tens of thousands.

Pageantry was one among many Edwardian “invented traditions.” As Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have argued, the widespread progress of electoral democracy throughout Great Britain in the thirty to forty years before the First World War and the consequent emergence of mass politics necessitated a restructuring of social relations that was in part brought about through the creation of new cultural practices seeking to create continuities between a “modern” present and an imagined past.¹⁰⁴ Meeting “the era of crowds” with bucolic visions of “an age when men did not worship the commercial trinity (pounds, shillings, pence),”

¹⁰² “Notes of the Week,” *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* (4 May 1907), 541; Amice MacDonnell, “The Dramatic Genius of the Common People,” *Review of Reviews* (April 1906), 364.

¹⁰³ On the anglophilia of American tourists at the pageants and the influence of English pageantry on the initial development of American pageantry, see Glassberg, 43-45.

¹⁰⁴ Hobsbawm, “Mass Producing Traditions,” 267-268.

pageantry sought to forge connections between more recent democratic virtues and the virtues of a communalism associated with preindustrial England.¹⁰⁵

Although the use of the word “pageant” to describe these events suggested continuity with medieval and early modern forms of theater, modern pageantry, as envisaged by Parker, was never intended to be a revival of these earlier spectacles. Nor did Parker wish his “newer and much higher form of pageantry” to be confused with other well-known (if comically named) village festivities still in existence such as the “wayzegoose” and the “beanfeast.”¹⁰⁶ Rather, he conceived of pageantry as a new, socially progressive form of drama inspired by the aesthetic splendor and merriment associated with pageants of the past. Although the pageant historian Robert Withington believed that sixteenth-century chronicle plays provided a closer parallel to modern pageantry than pageants of any period, Parker, for his part, originally chose the term “folk-play,” a designation that emphasized the genre’s social dimension as well as its commitment to locating and expressing authentic forms of English culture. Unfortunately, the term “awoke no enthusiasm” when he first used it to describe his plans for what would come to be called the *Sherborne Pageant*.¹⁰⁷ In the end, “pageant” was chosen over “folk-play” because it was an “old term which meant nothing very definite to anybody, but which suggested delightful masquerading.”¹⁰⁸

While medieval and early modern pageants had turned religious narratives into popular drama or staged allegorical tableaux celebrating the virtues of sovereigns, it was place that

¹⁰⁵ Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), xiii; “Sherborne: Past and Present,” *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (28 July 1904), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Parker quoted in Robert Withington, *English Historical Pageantry, an Outline*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1918-20), 195.

¹⁰⁷ Withington, 197.

¹⁰⁸ Parker quoted in Withington, *English Historical Pageantry*, vol. 2, 198.

determined plot in Edwardian pageantry. Accordingly, the *Sherborne Pageant* was neither a religious nor a royal occasion that only marginally concerned the village in which it took place. Rather, it was a historical chronicle of Sherborne, once the capital of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, from its founding in 705 AD until 1593, presented in twelve episodes and six interludes. Whereas the involvement of local amateur performers in early modern pageants had often been compulsory, as well as restricted to certain groups and classes, voluntary participation and interclass co-operation were central to Edwardian pageantry's self-definition. Despite the fact that Sherborne's population was only approximately 5,700 at the time, more than eight hundred Shirburnians of diverse social and economic circumstances played the part of their predecessors in the *Sherborne Pageant* and another 2,400 took part in its yearlong preparations.¹⁰⁹

Early modern pageants had been decidedly spectacular events, making use of elaborate devices and technical effects created by London professionals. By contrast, Edwardian pageants sought to articulate the ideal of the "home-made," according to which all costumes, properties and scenic elements were kept to a minimum, designed with simplicity and created solely by local people from materials made or found in the town itself. Through the voluntary participation of local residents in all design, production and performance processes (an enterprise which could last more than a year) a pageant would, according to Parker, encourage craftsmanship and support local industry. By involving residents of different classes, pageants would discourage prejudice and strengthen civic unity. In concert with its lofty social goals, the new pageantry aimed to restore artistic legitimacy to the genre by replacing the allegory, verse and *tableaux-vivants* of past pageants with a historical realism approximating that of the nineteenth-century English stage.

¹⁰⁹ "The Pageant," *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (22 June 1905), 2.

Pageant texts were written and published as plays, and many writers, including T.S. Eliot and E.M. Forster, would try their hand at writing pageants in the post-war years. Nevertheless, Joshua Esty, whose work has considered the influence of pageantry on late modernist writers, is not wrong to say that it is “stretching accuracy to describe these plays as a literary form.”¹¹⁰ Although literary quality was a shared concern of pageant-devisers, Edwardian pageants were, first and foremost, “experiments in social engineering” created by specific communities, often at particularly important moments in their political, economic and cultural development.¹¹¹

For the towns and villages who created them, pageants offered both a means to affirm the bonds of community identity, as well as the opportunity to re-establish crucial social, cultural and economic links with London and other cities. For urban audiences, pageants were occasions to acquire social and cultural capital, as well to perform their status as modern subjects.

Pageantry’s success, I propose, lay in its ability to overcome disconcerting conceptions of the Edwardian crowd as either barbarian horde or mindless herd (or both) by reimagining it as a crowd capable of shuttling back and forth between past and present, history and modernity, city and country, authenticity and artifice, and between communal and individual conceptions of selfhood, all without a sense of either shock or *malaise*. In the following pages I begin by situating the need for new representations of collectivity in the Edwardian discourse concerning crowds and then go on to discuss the various ways in which the first of the new pageants, Louis Napoleon Parker’s *Sherborne Pageant*, wittingly and unwittingly created the conditions for new versions of the crowd to take shape.

¹¹⁰ Esty, 57. In *A Shrinking Island* Esty discusses pageant texts written by T.S. Eliot (*The Rock*, 1934) and E.M. Forster (*Abinger Pageant*, 1934 and *England’s Pleasant Land*, 1938), as well as two novels that use pageant performances as a narrative device: John Cowper Powys’ *Glastonbury Romance* (1932) and Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941).

¹¹¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” 13.

The Crowd at Home in Edwardian England

That pageants provided numerous opportunities for social critique is clear given how frequently they appear in the satirical cartoons of the period. In a frame from a 1924 cartoon by the *Daily Mirror's* W.K. Haselden, a pageant performed under an imaginary sun serves as an example of British optimism (figure 4). For Haselden, the act of imagining an outdoor pageant is evidence of a national tendency to remain oblivious in the face of obstacles as ubiquitous as rain-filled English summers. Haselden's "pageant" provides an apt metaphor for how Edwardian England has been regarded for most the twentieth century: an imaginary sun shines over all its pursuits. Until recently the years between 1890 and 1914 have been depicted as one "long and leisurely afternoon" during which imperial strength was at its apogee and national security was assured, leaving British men and women to focus their energies on dressing fashionably and entertaining one another.¹¹² However, more recent works such as Roy Hattersley's *The Edwardians* have produced a more sober portrait of the era, one that admits the existence of significant social unrest as well as serious doubts about the nation's ability to maintain its vast empire.

Although the Edwardian era witnessed the consolidation of England's empire, significant resistance to English imperial authority in the colonies, as well as the series of disasters connected with the Boer War, led many Edwardians to question the value of maintaining imperialist policies, especially when such policies only served to strain England's relationship with its allies and did little to bolster a flagging domestic economy. The consequences of questioning, rather than assuming, the purpose of imperial pursuits, were far-reaching. As imperial ambitions shrank, Edwardians turned their attention to matters at home. Already undergoing significant changes as a result of the extension of the franchise, British politics

¹¹² Roy Hattersley, *The Edwardians*, (London: Little, Brown, 2004), viii.

during the emergence of the pageantry movement was marked by a transformation in the organization of political parties and greater attention to domestic issues such as tariff reform and unemployment. In the cultural sphere, the nation's waning commitment to empire was reflected in what Joshua Esty describes as an “anthropological turn.” During this period Edwardians began to retrain the anthropological gaze, once reserved for colonial subjects, on themselves.¹¹³ As Esty points out, pageantry was one of the more unique and early traces of England’s anthropological turn. It told the nation’s “rough island story,” by collecting, organizing, and displaying native traditions in art, dance, music, poetry, and folklore.¹¹⁴

Although they attempted to treat their historical material with great accuracy and objectivity, most pageant-devisers followed Parker’s recommendation to conclude their historical surveys “at the time of the Civil War, or earlier.”¹¹⁵ Because “Whig and Tory camps still exist in England, and feeling still runs high,” he believed it was “unsafe. . . to come nearer than the middle of the seventeenth century” if one hoped to preserve the image of a united kingdom.¹¹⁶ Although nationalist pageants customarily glide over periods of internal conflict, they do not, in general, avoid representing events establishing the nation’s imperial authority. Despite the well-established associations between pageantry and colonial expansion that had developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one of the more peculiar features of the Parkerian form of Edwardian pageantry is that England rarely appears as an imperial power. On the contrary, England is portrayed as a rebellious subject of Roman imperial authority. In numerous pageants the tribes of ancient Britannia can be seen battling alongside Boadicea,

¹¹³ Esty, 2.

¹¹⁴ “Country Notes.” *Country Life*, May 13, 1905.

¹¹⁵ Parker, quoted in Withington, *English Historical Pageantry*, 221.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Queen of the Iceni, who according to legend led a successful uprising against Roman authorities in AD 60. So popular was Parker's "Boadicea" opening from his third pageant at Bury St. Edmund's that the scene was filmed by the Charles Urban Trading Company and widely imitated by other pageant creators in the decades following. Rough, boisterous, unfailingly loyal and capable of tremendous sacrifices for the sake of reclaiming their sovereignty, the ancient Britons who were a popular feature of Edwardian pageants confirm Esty's assertion that "the term 'native,' once condescendingly assigned to the colonised, was now clung to and honoured."¹¹⁷

Although Edwardian pageants made no explicit critique of imperialism, pageantry's general exclusion of all references to empire implied that England's future depended not upon its imperial acquisitions, but rather on the enduring strength of its native provinces. Some observers went so far as to cast their support for the new pageantry in strongly anti-imperial terms. After seeing Parker's third pageant at Bury St. Edmund's, one reviewer applauded the genre's redefinition of patriotism: "The working-man may have learnt that it is his duty to serve the Empire, or to serve his country, by being prepared to *die* for it. Few working-men, I imagine, have hitherto conceived it is possible to serve their town and neighbourhood . . . by *living* for it."¹¹⁸ Despite such occasional statements, however, pageants did not so much reject imperialism as look past its dominant influence on modern conceptions of Englishness in order to assert the more enduring influence of native traditions. For pageant advocates the real threat to English communal identity was not imperialism but the "baseness of modernity," which denied the expression of all natural, human instincts including the instinct for pageantry.¹¹⁹

Upon the heels of the critical and popular success of the *Sherborne Pageant*, its creator,

¹¹⁷ Esty, 22.

¹¹⁸ Fanny Johnson, "Pageantry and Oxford and Bury" *The Practical Teacher*, vol. 28, no. 3 (September 1907), 134.

¹¹⁹ Chesterton, "Our Notebook," *Illustrated London News* (19 June 1909), 180.

Louis Napoleon Parker, gave a speech to the London branch of the Arts and Crafts Society in which he railed against the modern age with its disregard for historical significance and its overabundance of advertising posters and cheap luxury items. The new pageantry, he explained, was designed to “kill the modernising spirit, which destroys all loveliness and has no loveliness of its own to put in its place.”¹²⁰ As successors of William Morris, members of the Arts and Crafts Society were already well-acquainted with the idea of pageantry as an antidote to modernity. As early as 1882, John Ruskin, whose ideas served as the foundation of Morris’ work, had called for a revival of pageantry that would restore a sense of vitality to a “dull and depressed age.”¹²¹ Twenty years later, May Morris, following her father’s socialist reimagining of Ruskin’s principles, published her proposal for a pageant revival that would not only restore communal life, but would also create opportunities for local craftsmen.¹²²

For Ruskin, Chesterton, Morris and countless members of the *fin de siècle* cultural elite, modernity, in virtually all its aspects, was the blade that had severed England from an organic sense of Englishness. During this period, the figure of the crowd came to epitomize that rupture. Although the problem of crowds had been an important subject of British social thought prior to the twentieth century, the crowds described variously by Edmund Burke, Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold generally appear at some distance from the observer.¹²³ They are sporadic formations, led by charismatic individuals and bound by specific political goals and ideologies

¹²⁰ Parker, “Historical Pageants,” *Journal of the Society of the Arts* vol. 54 (22 December 1905), 143.

¹²¹ John Ruskin, untitled article in *The Globe* (15 February 1882).

¹²² May Morris, “Pageantry and the Masque,” *Journal of the Society of Arts*, vol. 50 (27 June 1902), 669-77.

¹²³ For a discussion of Edmund Burke’s views on crowds, see Mary Fairclough, *The Romantic Crowd: Sympathy, Controversy and Print Culture*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On Carlyle see McClelland, *The Crowd and the Mob*. On Arnold, see Gage McWeeny, “Crowd Management: Matthew Arnold and the Science of Society,” *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 41, no. 1, (April 2003), 93-112. See also John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

that are not necessarily attributable to the majority of the populace. However, with the publication of Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind* in 1896, the crowd begins to take on the metonymic function of representing all of society. Although on the whole, Edwardian social critics rejected monolithic theories of the crowd emerging from other parts of Europe, they nevertheless agreed generally with Le Bon's proposition that "man as an individual and man as a crowd unit are two totally different creatures"; looking around them, they began to find "considerations of [crowds] everywhere in the air and in the press."¹²⁴

Yet the two versions of the crowd appearing most regularly in Edwardian texts are, in fact, quite different from one another. For press observers of bank, rail station, and theater crowds, London crowds exhibit a "native brutality, fostered by the absurd notion that a crowd may commit acts of savagery which would land an individual in the dock."¹²⁵ These occasional urban crowds take form in relation to a particular set of circumstances or events; when banks and theaters open their doors, or when the train arrives, the crowd can easily become a violent mob. Implicit in descriptions of "crushing" such as these is the specter of the urban masses, domestic "savages" who, though English by birth, have yet to be properly educated in British manners.

A very different kind of crowd appears in the writings of "marginalised aesthetes" like Chesterton, whose semi-futuristic novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, emphasized the "strange loneliness of millions in a crowd."¹²⁶ Bemoaning the monotony and artifice of modern life, a shopkeeper in the novel describes "blank, well-ordered streets and men in black moving about inoffensively, sullenly."¹²⁷ As symptoms of anomie, Chesterton's crowds epitomize an England

¹²⁴ Kernahan, Coulson. "The Crowd," *The Bookman* (July 1896), 116.

¹²⁵ "The British Crowd," *The Speaker* (23 April 1892), 488.

¹²⁶ Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (London: Bodley Head, 1904), 149.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

in which social life had become enervated and devoid of meaning. The difference, as well as the connection, between these two crowds is best expressed by another Haselden cartoon (figure 5). In the upper frame “a crowd of fairly ordinary looking human beings waiting for a train” gives us Chesterton’s version of the crowd as alienated and affectless. The lower frame shows “the extraordinary metamorphosis when the train comes in” as the seemingly passive bystanders turn into a pack of wild bulls, boars, and tigers. In Haselden’s split-scene the crowd is everyone, and its members are either complete strangers or cutthroat competitors. There is no third possibility.

Though crowds generally appear as signs of rupture, many regarded Le Bon’s dystopian view of the future as at best exaggerated and at worst irrational.¹²⁸ Typical of British press responses to *The Crowd* was the caveat that although “it is easy to work oneself up into a passion of hatred and scorn for crowds and all their ways,” it must be “remembered that civilization and morality have been brought about by crowd influence on public opinion.”¹²⁹ Under the right circumstances, a crowd is “capable of sacrifice, nobility, and generosity, far surpassing that of its separate members.”¹³⁰ For those inclined towards optimism, crowds were neither a source of violence nor of revulsion. Rather, the unique ability of crowds to motivate their members to work cooperatively offered hope for a nation in search of a sense of collective purpose.

Against the backdrop of this ongoing public conversation, Parker’s claims that “the crowd is the characteristic and astonishing part of a pageant, and [that] its size and movements

¹²⁸ On nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social theory in England see Philip Abrams, *The Origins of British Sociology: 1834-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Vivien Palmer, “Impressions of Sociology in Great Britain,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 32, no. 5 (Mar 1927), 756-761; R.N. Soffer, “New Elitism: Social Psychology in Prewar England,” *The Journal of British Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2 (May 1969), 111-140; R.N. Soffer, “The Revolution in English Social Thought: 1880-1914,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 75, no. 7 (Dec 1970), 1938-1964.

¹²⁹ Martin Conway, “The Individual and the Crowd,” *Nineteenth Century and After: a Monthly Review*, vol. 59, no. 351 (May 1906), 865.

¹³⁰ Kernahan, 116.

contribute mainly to its success” invites us to consider the relationship between the crowd on a pageant stage and the crowd in the street. Parker’s use of the word “crowd” here and elsewhere to describe groups of performers playing townsfolk, villagers, and the like is, of course, entirely in keeping with the vernacular of the post-Renaissance English stage. As such, it would unremarkable, and only tangentially connected with the sociological problem of the crowd were it not that Parker repeatedly emphasizes a single idea throughout his writings and speeches on pageantry: the significance of the stage crowd’s ability to deliver authentic performances of collective behavior.

Parker tells his Arts and Crafts audience, “Although it may at first sight seem difficult to make a really large crowd act, I assure you it is the easiest thing in the world. [. . .] Get a real crowd, and once make them understand they have to express real emotions as they would in real life, and the effects are astonishing, not to say terrifying.”¹³¹ The exaggerated emphasis Parker places here and elsewhere on “real crowds” expressing “real emotions,” and “real life,” tellingly implicates the artifice of the modern crowd. He suggests that stage crowds, paradoxically capable of becoming more “real” (less self-conscious, more instinctual, and more expressive) by means of performance, may serve as a model for acceptable and even ideal forms of collective behavior.

At the same time, it is clear to Parker that the authenticity of the crowd’s behavior is not an end in itself, but an effect intended to produce further astonishing and terrifying effects. In every pageant, he says, “the crowd must be spirited, and continually alert. It must laugh, shout, cheer, groan, execrate, riot, and fight with unfaltering gusto. Above all, it must be natural.”¹³² What is significant, then, about a pageant’s crowd of performers is that it permits us to imagine a

¹³¹ Parker, *Journal of the Society of the Arts*, 144.

¹³² Louis Napoleon Parker, *Several of my Lives* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1928), 283.

third frame existing between Haselden's estranged commuters and his pack of wild beasts: a crowd capable of expressing a full range of "authentic" emotions while remaining amenable to the domesticating influences of patrician culture. The ability of rural inhabitants to give credible performances of vigorous and unfettered but *governable* crowds was crucial to the success of pageantry as the genre of Edwardian crowd transformation.

"It Takes a Village": Expanding the Field of Performance

Although one may well assume that rural Shirburnians would be better equipped than Londoners to offer uninhibited performances of folk culture, Parker admits that even crowds of actual English villagers must be coached to express their "natural" instincts.¹³³ Twenty years earlier, Dorset's most famous author, Thomas Hardy, had described with profound disappointment the near complete disappearance of the Dorsetshire rustic:

A glance up the high street of [a Dorset] town on a Candle-mas fair day twenty or thirty years ago revealed a crowd whose general colour was whitey-brown flecked with white. Black was almost absent, the few farmers who wore that shade being hardly discernible. Now the crowd is as dark as a London crowd. [. . .] There is no mark of speciality in the groups, who might be tailors or undertaker's men for what they exhibit externally."¹³⁴

Sherborne, one of the oldest villages in Dorset, was no exception. Given Hardy's well-known love of Dorset and passion for preservation, it was hardly surprising that he was Parker's first choice to write the book of the pageant. Though he declined the offer, Sherborne confidently set out to resurrect Hardy's vanished Dorset crowds through a performance of folk history involving more than half its population. Its reasons for doing so, however, have less to do with sharing Hardy's nostalgic yearning for visible signs of social order than with recognizing the pragmatic value of luring the modern crowd to Sherborne.

¹³³ Ibid., 289.

¹³⁴ Thomas Hardy, "The Dorsetshire Labourer," *Longman's Magazine* (July 1883), 258.

Like many villages throughout England, Sherborne's economy never recovered from the agricultural and trade depressions of the nineteenth century. Peter Graham's 1892 book *The Rural Exodus* described "a movement [from village to town] that has outgrown all proportion. [Those] who are adapted for the struggles of town life, as well as those who are not so, are laying down the implements of agriculture and hastening to compete for places at desk and counter."¹³⁵ Moreover, with an increasing concentration of goods and services in London, Sherborne's tradespeople faced shrinking markets, and were therefore compelled to move in even greater numbers than farm workers.¹³⁶ The effect of industrialization on rural communities was a source of anxiety even for city-dwellers because England's villages remained, as Hobsbawm puts it, "the foundation and framework of an entire society, rooted in remotest antiquity, which rested on the man who made the land produce."¹³⁷

However, in the generally accepted view of scholars of British modernity, industrialization became "inescapable rather than a choice" after about 1870.¹³⁸ From that point forward the transition from an *industrializing* to an *industrial* society is, in most essential ways, complete. The significance of this point for an understanding of Edwardian pageantry is that in an already urbanized and industrialized England, the rural English folk of legend cannot be reconstructed outside the mechanisms of modernity. Even the idea of the village can no longer be maintained in a "purified realm outside of industry."¹³⁹ Unless, therefore, we ascribe to Edwardian pageant creators, performers and spectators (a rather large percentage of the

¹³⁵ P. Anderson Graham, *The Rural Exodus: the Problem of the Village and the Town* (London: Methuen, 1892), 2.

¹³⁶ "Winter's Approach and Work for the People," *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (3 Nov 1904), 2.

¹³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: from 1750 to the Present Day* (New York: New Press, 1999), 173.

¹³⁸ Dauntton and Rieger, 2.

¹³⁹ Elizabeth Outka, *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 62.

population) either a widespread form of amnesia or a wholly irrational optimism, we must recognize pageantry's explicitly antimodernist positioning as a strategy of adapting to and accommodating the changing demands of the modern age. Understood in this light, what is at stake in Sherborne's ability to supply its audience with authentic performances of folk collectivity is the question of whether or not it will be able to salvage its failing economy by transforming itself from a rural, out-of-the-way village into a crowd attraction.

Fourteen months before the performance of the pageant, Sherborne's village council began to discuss how best to commemorate the 1200th anniversary of the founding of Bishopric of Sherborne by St. Aldhelm. Initial suggestions, including the erection a new monument and the restoration of Sherborne's celebrated eighth-century abbey, reflected a latent antiquarianism. However, the recent financial success of Winchester's celebrations of the King Alfred Millenary made Sherborne's councilmen eager to use the occasion to draw more visitors to the village. Parker was invited to submit his proposal for the performance of a pageant concerning the history of the village.

The idea of creating a pageant in Sherborne originated during an exchange of letters between Parker, and his friend, Arthur Field, a teacher at the Sherborne School, where Parker had been a music teacher. The decision by Sherborne's town council to invest in the enterprise was influenced in large part by the fact that after leaving Sherborne Parker had become well-known as a playwright in London. *Dudgeons* (1893), *Rosemary* (1896), and *The Cardinal* (1903) attained box-office success both in London and in New York, launching a highly successful playwriting career in England and in the United States that would last until the beginning of the First World War. Unlike nearly all the other pageant-devisers discussed in the present work, Parker was not associated with any of the theatrical avant-gardes of the century. Schooled strictly

in the tradition of the late-nineteenth century realist stage, he never aimed to revolutionize the British theater. Like many other theater reformers of his era he did argue, however, that it ought to strive towards a greater sense of purpose, both by restoring its links to England's rural past and by forging links between the professional theaters in London and the non-professional theaters in the countryside.

Parker's success allowed him to become part of the theatrical culture of London in the pre-war period, and to travel in its artistic circles. Though his eccentricities were ordinary by comparison with other artists and writers of the time, he was one among the large cast of "English eccentrics" appearing in the book of that name by Edith Sitwell.¹⁴⁰ The rapid spread of pageantry in the year following his *Sherborne Pageant* was only partly attributable to the success of that production. It owed also to the force of Parker's personality. Images of Parker with his signature moustache and megaphone appeared regularly in the press after 1905, and he was asked by journalists to give his opinion not only on matters of pageantry and theater, but also on general matters of culture including men's fashion. Parker acquired celebrity status as a result of his work on pageantry. In turn, Edwardian pageantry, particularly in its early stages, was able to acquire a caché that it might not otherwise have had because Parker was part of the London scene.

The pageant Parker proposed comprised twelve chronological episodes arranged so as to alternate between scenes of devotion, battle, festivity and comedy. The first half of the *Pageant* relates the history of Sherborne from the ninth century to the early twelfth century, while the second half focuses on events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Episode One depicts Sherborne's transition from paganism to Christianity, and its founding by St. Aldhelm in AD 705. The second episode (AD 845) centers on a battle between invading Danes and the

¹⁴⁰ See Edith Sitwell, *English Eccentrics* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1957).

ultimately victorious Shirburnians. In the third episode, an elaborate series of rituals surrounding the death of King Ethelbald gives way to the arrival of a young prince, the future Alfred the Great. The fourth episode, which tells the story of introduction of Benedictine rule in 885, features bits of slapstick and clowning performed by the undisciplined monks of Sherborne. After the fifth episode, which portrays William the Conqueror dissolving the bishopric of Sherborne in 1075, the sixth focuses on the restoration of Sherborne in 1107 when Roger of Caen begins to build Sherborne Castle, the ruins of which served as the setting for the *Pageant*.

Skipping forward more than three centuries to the year 1437, the seventh episode featured “racy dialogue in the Dorset dialect” and a battle between the townsfolk and monks over right of access to the parish font. Episode Eight, which concerned the foundation of Sherborne’s historic Almshouse was performed, in part, by fourteen Almshouse residents. In Episode Nine (1539), Sherborne’s monks are now depicted as allies, rather than as enemies, of the villagers. The people protest the order of expulsion given by King Henry VIII. Despite pleading, speech-making and rioting, however, Sherborne’s monastery is dissolved and the monks are sent away. Although this is perhaps the lowest point in the pageant, the tenth and eleventh episodes allow it to conclude on an optimistic note by representing two events for which Sherborne was, and is, still known. The 1550 founding of the prestigious (and still flourishing) Sherborne School is the subject of Episode Ten, while the eleventh episode extols the simple pleasures of country life as experienced by Sir Walter Raleigh, who received Sherborne Castle as a gift from Queen Elizabeth I. The pageant concludes in episode twelve with Morris and maypole dances, an allegorical tableau representing Sherborne’s past and present, and, finally, the “march past” during which all the performers—out of character but still in costume—pass by the grandstands

before disappearing from view.¹⁴¹

During a specially called town meeting one year before the pageant was to take place, Parker delivered a lengthy and detailed speech—the nearest we come to a “manifesto” for Edwardian pageantry—designed to overcome the skepticism of Shirburnians who had doubts about undertaking such a massive project when, after all, “everyone leads such separate lives and many don’t know who Aldhelm is anyway.”¹⁴² He assures the gathering that the pageant will “be done by all Sherborne, together by all churches, and by all the inhabitants, with no distinction whatsoever.” This statement earns a bit of applause. He then reminds the audience that they will be performing an important civic duty on behalf of village, county, and nation by presenting scenes of English history in a vivid and memorable form. This too earns polite applause. Parker is keenly aware, however, that the democratic, civic and antiquarian appeal of the pageant is, for this audience, secondary to its commercial appeal. He therefore directs a far greater portion of his speech towards demonstrating how a performance of folk culture on the scale he imagines will revive Sherborne’s economy.

He begins by reminding his audience that the village is “not at present as well-known as it deserves to be. There are hundreds and thousands on their way to Devonshire, to Cornwall [. . .] who, never having heard of Sherborne, rush through it without [giving] it a thought, or, if the train they are in happens, by the grace of the South Western to pull up here, look out of the window, and only see the Gasworks.” He goes on to guide his listeners through a vision of reawakening modeled on William Morris’ *A Dream of John Ball*. Like the hero of Morris’ 1888 novel, who wakes one morning to find himself comfortably settled in a medieval English village,

¹⁴¹ “The Sherborne Celebration,” *Antiquary* (August 1905), 303-309.

¹⁴² All quotations on this page and the following are from Parker’s speech to the Sherborne town meeting as published in “St. Aldhelm Celebration,” *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (21 July 1904), 2

Shirburnians, says Parker, will discover themselves and their village magically transformed on the morning of the pageant:

You are waked early by the joyful clamour of the abbey bells. You rise and find yourself in a gaily decorated town, all agog with the feeling that something unusual, something quite unprecedented, is about to take place. [. . .] Soon after, your work begins. You have to play the host and welcome the many friends known and unknown who begin to stream in. They come afoot, the come in every sort of conveyance from special trains and motor cars to bicycles and donkey carts. The streets would be impassable but that the wise foresight of your reception committee has prepared for every possible contingency. Some have elected to spend the night; many indeed, have proposed to stay the whole week. [. . .] And still the people stream in. At three o'clock the abbey bells peal again and all the town, and all her guests, and all the strangers in her gates, stream out towards the castle ruins.

Parker's staging of this imaginary scene evidently delighted his audience whose cheers and appreciative laughter punctuated his speech. The vision Parker describes plays upon an often exercised Edwardian trope—the fantasy of waking up in “Merrie England”—but, significantly, the fantasy is one that does not banish modernity in all its forms, but rather welcomes it in the form of “special trains and motor cars” that transport London crowds to Sherborne. It is—nearly literally—a scene of accommodation wherein London crowds not only fill the streets of the village as they make their way towards the pageant grounds, but continue to stay on, presumably spending their holiday cash in guest houses, shops and historical sites. That the village in Parker's vision has been restored to its former aesthetic splendor is directly tied to the renewal of its economic vitality. Moreover, it is quite different from the one he enacts for his Arts and Crafts audience in London. In Sherborne, pageantry is not aimed at “killing the modernising spirit” but at luring modern crowds toward the village by accommodating their consumerist spirit.

Elizabeth Outka points out that scholars of British modernity have generally seen efforts to generate “authenticity” as a reaction against the excessive production of “artifice” in

modernity: “Changes in advertising, marketing and shopping created popular and enticing new avenues for artifice and performance [that] predictably produced a backlash, fueling anxious efforts to recapture something real, something authentic and genuine to set against such flux.”¹⁴³

She continues:

The two camps of artifice and authenticity are usually considered in opposition, roughly mapping onto, on the one hand, a cutting-edge modernity, and, on the other, a more conservative impulse to preservation and stability. The obvious contradiction between these two camps has, however, obscured their fundamental relationship within a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon [...] the half-hidden but pervasive desire to unite Wildean idea of artifice and performance and continual self-fashioning with the contrary but appealing ideas of authenticity, stability, and continuity.¹⁴⁴

For Outka, the desire to unite seemingly contradictory impulses towards artifice and authenticity generates the category of the *commodified authentic*: objects, places, experiences and performances that appealed to consumers because of the paradoxes that they sustained and made accessible.

Outka’s analysis of late nineteenth-century model towns may be usefully applied to the case of Sherborne and its pageant. In these newly constructed, permanent environments, “consumers were given a new stage, an entire town within which they might perform a new role. They would not merely be spectators browsing through an exhibition but denizens of a new way of life.”¹⁴⁵ Like the model towns, Sherborne hoped to make use of its authentic aura to promote itself and its industries. From the outset, however, Parker understood that pageantry’s appeal depended largely upon its ability to represent noncommercial values. He counseled, “A pageant must never be undertaken with a view to making money. We are too much in the habit of

¹⁴³ Outka, 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 31.

disguising even our most innocent entertainments under a cloak of charity. A pageant is worth doing for itself. If it be not worth that, it is worth nothing and had much better be left undone.”¹⁴⁶ Unlike the model towns, then, Sherborne did not aim to profit immediately from its pageant; nevertheless it did expect to achieve long-term economic benefits by becoming a place where urban crowds could go to experience old and new forms of Englishness.

Parker explained to Shirburnians that in order to convince visiting crowds that life in their village was indeed different from life in London—closer to nature and history, healthier, more colorful, more communal—the field of performance activity generated by the pageant would have to extend beyond the boundaries of the pageant stage to encompass the entirety of Sherborne. Parker insists in his speech that all of Sherborne’s inhabitants will have to participate. As members of the “host” crowd they will have to get into character well before the crowds of “guests” arrived and continue to stay in character well after the closing of the final performance. Once transformed by the pageant, Parker promises that Sherborne will prosper both from increased tourism as well as from the sale of land and cottages to new seasonal and permanent residents. In return for thoroughly rehearsed, well organized and virtuosic performances of folk collectivity—onstage and offstage—Shirburnians will be rewarded with the permanent, periodic return of the crowd to Sherborne. The crowd’s mobility will redefine the economic relationship of village to metropolis, creating a flexible modern economy based on a combination of affective, agricultural and industrial forms of labor.

Sherborne’s attempt to provide a convincing performance of communal life addresses Outka’s conception of the commodified authentic from the perspective of the producer. However, also important to Outka’s theory is the way in which the commodified authentic allows consumers to experience “previously contradictory elements without strain” in

¹⁴⁶ Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 289-290.

environments that are explicitly simulated or invented, and therefore, “tantalizingly modern.”¹⁴⁷ In reminding his audience that the *Sherborne Pageant* “must appear to be a natural growth of [Sherborne’s] joys and sufferings,” that “it must seem traditional,” Parker indicates his awareness that the pageant’s authenticity is manufactured, but that this can itself be promoted as a source of pleasure.¹⁴⁸ On one hand, the pageant must *seem* to be geographically and temporally remote; on the other hand it must, in reality, be reasonably accessible to urban crowds if the experiences of contradiction and paradox are to be pleasurable. To accommodate visiting crowds Sherborne’s village council named previously unnamed streets, put up new signs and street lamps, repaired buildings, broadened roads to make room for parking, and hired extra police from London to maintain order. Special trains were organized offering cheap day-fares returning the same day from London. Insisting that “whatever else we do, we must never bore the audience,” Parker made sure that the performance would give crowds “enough time to get home without crushing or inconvenience.”

Though it is true of nearly all forms of theater that the preparations made prior to performance (rehearsal, construction, planning, etc.) are integral to the meanings produced by the performance, these are even more significant in the case of mass pageants where preparations are often tied to the pageants’ larger social, cultural and political purposes. The year spent preparing the *Sherborne Pageant* was crucial in creating the conditions in which Shirburnians could imagine themselves as part of a momentous undertaking. Mick Wallis’ assertion that the experience of scale and plenitude is an essential constituent of spectacular performance applies not only to the performances of the *Sherborne Pageant* that took place in the summer of 1905, but also to the field of performance generated in Sherborne over the course of the half-year prior

¹⁴⁷ Outka, 29.

¹⁴⁸ Parker, quoted In “St. Aldhelm Celebration.”

to the pageant.¹⁴⁹

Six months before the pageant was performed, the *Dorset and Somerset Standard* began to issue weekly reports on the rapidly increasing number of tickets sold, contributions made, hotel rooms booked, and even the number of pageant articles and advertisements appearing in London papers that week. During pageant week, it published daily statistics on the number of people arriving in Sherborne by train from London. At the end of a week of pageant performances, it reported that more than 30,000 people—nearly six times Sherborne’s population—had seen the pageant during its three dress rehearsals and five formal performances. The experience of scale and plenitude that was gradually built up over the months leading up to pageant week seemed to cast Parker’s dream of repopulating the streets and homes of Sherborne within the realm of possibility.

During the pageant local merchants advertised all manner of “authentic” goods: “Raleigh Chairs” made of local oak, silk cloth manufactured in Sherborne, dolls dressed in pageant costumes, bicycles, photographic souvenirs, as well as tobacco pouches and patches emblazoned with pageant designs. Shirburnians were financially rewarded for letting rooms in their homes, for selling food and refreshment and for giving tours of local sites of natural and historical interest. The *Standard* unexpectedly sold out of more than 1,000 extra copies of its paper on the first day of the pageant, as well as copies of the pageant programme and Book of Words. In the end, the pageant made nearly double what it had cost.

Parker’s ambitious plans for the pageant far exceeded what Shirburnians initially believed possible with respect to its critical, popular and commercial success. To produce an immense folk-play in a depopulated village and to expect thousands of spectators to attend might

¹⁴⁹ Mick Wallis, “Pageantry and the Popular Front: Ideological Production in the Thirties.” *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 38, 1994, 138.

have seemed utterly absurd had Parker never visited Richard Wagner's Bayreuth Festival. During his tenure as England's premier pageant-deviser, Parker never hinted that his pageants had been influenced by anything other than British history and theater. Hence, many were likely surprised to learn from his 1928 autobiography, that the original inspiration for the *Sherborne Pageant* came from Parker's twenty summers in Bayreuth.

Framing the Crowd: Landscape, Ruins and Wagnerian Spectatorship

The pages of the Wagnerite journal, *The Meister*, to which Parker regularly contributed, reveal that British Wagnerians were fond of repeating Wagner's dictum from "The Artwork of the Future": "Only by the Folk or in the footsteps of the Folk can poetry really be made."¹⁵⁰ On one hand, we might see the distance between Wagner's *Volk* and Parker's folk as significant. Whereas for Wagner, *das Volk* defines a racially purified and homogeneous collectivity, the Parkerian folk are a stable, heterogeneous, and flexible social formation. On the other hand, Wagner's *Volk* and Parker's folk are both constituted through acts of spectatorship that take place within and across the carefully constructed boundaries of the theatrical space.

As a transplanted Englishman, originally of French and American ancestry, and raised in Italy and Germany, Parker revered Wagner's music-dramas as a "universal language" that could be understood by anyone, regardless of religion, class or nationality. His efforts to bring "the Bayreuth spirit" to rural England attested to his belief that "Wagner's art was the people's art." He "contrasted the artistically half-starved provincial with the well-nourished Londoner," urging his "metropolitan brethren to spread Wagner's ideas throughout the land" by means of performances and publications.¹⁵¹ Parker followed Wagner in his conviction that communally inspired and spiritually resonant drama had the best chance of succeeding outside the metropolis.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Wagner, "The Art-work of the Future," 134.

¹⁵¹ Parker, "Wagner and the People," *The Musical Standard*, vol. 34, no. 1241 (12 May 1888), 299.

Bayreuth, not London, was for him the “Mecca of all aspirations.” Its reverent audiences, by contrast with “jaded London first-nighters” provided a model for how theater could engender community spirit and re-enchant modern life.¹⁵²

While much of *The Meister* was devoted to musings on Wagnerian themes, Parker marveled at Wagner’s ability to capture and hold the attention of Bayreuth crowds. Describing the opening of *Parsifal* he writes:

The curtains open, and what happens? – Nothing, or next to nothing. There is an ideal landscape laughing in the summer sun, a venerable priest asleep under a tree, and two youths reclining beside him. Silence. In the far distance trombones solemnly hail the rising sun. The sleepers wake. What do they do? They turn their backs to the audience, and kneel in prayer during some 20 bars of very slow, very stately, very solemn strains.[. . .] The mind of the audience is taken hold of in a mighty grip, it is cleared of all worldly cobwebs, swept and garnished, and the devotional keynote of the mystic play is at once struck, never to pass out of hearing during the rest of the evening.¹⁵³

Reading this passage alongside Parker’s description of *Sherborne’s* opening invites us to see the extent to which the Parkerian pageant is rooted in Wagner’s project to “turn the theater into a window of projective seeing and immersive attention” for the purposes of recasting modern spectatorship “as an active process of exchange, projection and transformation” across the divide between stage and auditorium.¹⁵⁴ In *Sherborne* Parker sought to emulate *Parsifal’s* sense of repose in an idealized landscape, its compelling silences, and its sense of sacred, continuous time:

The arena is absolutely empty and there is nowhere the slightest hint that anything is about to happen. On the stroke of the appointed hour, trumpeters march to center and sound a long flourish, which is the signal for silence. Then the unseen chorus strikes up the overture. The Narrative Chorus in dignified robes marches

¹⁵² Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 113; Parker, quoted in *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (21 July 1904), 2.

¹⁵³ Parker, “Wagner as Playwright,” *The Meister*, vol. 6, no. 23 (August 1893), 41.

¹⁵⁴ Lutz Koepnick, *Framing Attention: Windows on Modern German Culture*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007): 91; 77.

solemnly to center and forecasts the wonders we are about to be shown. And so the gigantic drama goes rolling on, without a break for two, three, perhaps four hours.¹⁵⁵

Parker fervently hoped that *Sherborne's* spectators would experience the same sense of wonder and devotion at seeing history and legend come to life as he himself experienced at Bayreuth. At Sherborne, as at Bayreuth, the illusion of an authentic, organic community encompassing both performers and spectators depended upon a careful reorganization of the theatrical environment and a purification of the visual field so as to ensure that, for the duration of the performance, the pageant's two crowds may exchange gazes across the arena without distraction.

If, according to Lutz Koepnick, Wagner's ambition was "neither to separate the stage by means a fourth wall, nor to do away with whatever might disconnect actors and spectators" but rather to "envision the proscenium as an interactive membrane" capable of reconciling seemingly opposed aesthetic traditions, Parker's conception of pageantry seems to share such ambitions despite its lack of either proscenium or curtain.¹⁵⁶ The "membrane" between actors and spectators at Sherborne was certainly thinner than at the Festspielhaus—the "fourth wall" appears to collapse at important moments throughout the pageant. Still, the scenic elements of *landscape* and *ruins* served to frame the attention of spectators in ways analogous to Wagner's proscenium.

Although the elements of landscape and ruins in pageant performances are frequently seen as an uncomplicated or innocent part of the pageant's "natural" environment—and hence overlooked—they in fact serve to regulate spectatorship in order to produce a space in which a sense of authentic, organic communality can be experienced without placing any significant impositions on the individual bodies of spectators. Landscapes and ruins function as "interfaces"

¹⁵⁵ Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 290-291.

¹⁵⁶ Koepnick, 63.

between human beings and nature, between past and present, and between country and city, allowing spectators to recognize themselves in the folk, but at the same time allowing them to record indelible impressions of their own inescapable modernity and crowd-ness.

Although he was invited to create pageants for more than twenty towns in the first two years after the *Sherborne Pageant*, Parker declined all but Warwick and Bury St. Edmund's on the grounds that the others did not possess sites worthy of the effort.¹⁵⁷ Any village wishing to produce a successful pageant, Parker avowed, would have to provide him with both an "original and untouched" landscape, as well as an impressive collection of distinguished ruins.¹⁵⁸

Assessing the restorative effects of the pageant on the crowds of visitors to Sherborne during pageant week, one visitor suggested that "Sherborne's aura or atmosphere is chiefly attributable to its beautiful landscape, possessing in abundance just the restful, calmative properties so much needed in this neurotic age."¹⁵⁹

If, however, for Parker and other pageant-devisers, village landscapes inspired a natural state of getting along that would quickly "[dissolve] the artificial restraints and enmities which the ordinary affairs of life seem inevitably to create," Denis Cosgrove's theorization of landscape offers an alternative perspective.¹⁶⁰ Defining landscape as a way "of seeing, a composition and structuring of the world so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom an illusion of order and control is offered" Cosgrove argues that despite their ability to create the illusion of social harmony, landscapes merely disguise tensions between the groups

¹⁵⁷ In all, Parker was responsible for six village pageants: Sherborne (1905); Warwick (1906); Bury St. Edmund's (1907); Dover (1908); York (1909); and Colchester (1909).

¹⁵⁸ "Warwick's Great Pageant Play," *Baltimore Sun* (17 June 1906), 5.

¹⁵⁹ Lisle, "Sherborne: Its Aura, or Atmosphere," *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (22 June 1905), 2.

¹⁶⁰ Gilbert Hudson, quoted in Withington, *English Historical Pageantry*, vol. 2, 203.

that inhabit them.¹⁶¹ Looking at Parker's arrangement of Sherborne's pageant grounds and arena as an "authored environment" comparable to a landscape makes it possible to see how tensions between country and city, and between past and present are suppressed or managed in order to produce a semblance of organic community.

Perhaps more like Wagner in this one respect than in any other, Parker insisted on the right to exercise complete control over Sherborne's pageant grounds for two months prior to pageant week. Following Parker's instructions, the pageant's vast grandstand was built to resemble an amphitheater and designed to afford "each spectator an unimpeded view of the entire pageant arena" without having to endure the discomfort of either bright sun or rain.¹⁶² Although Sherborne's financial resources did not permit it, Parker's second pageant grandstand at Warwick in 1906, like the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, concealed the orchestra and, additionally, allowed him to instruct his cadre of stage-managers—via bells, lights, flags, and speaking-tube—from a crow's nest on the roof.

At Sherborne, Parker also ensured that the audience's perspective would permit neither a view of modern buildings (the gasworks and railway station) nor a view of any theatrical structures, such as costume and properties tents. As one reviewer remarked, "no theatrical trappings, nothing meretricious, marred the noble simplicity of the landscape or tended to dillusionise the rapt spectators."¹⁶³ In order to ensure furthermore that spectators would not disrupt one another, each seat in the grandstand had a separate, numbered chair and latecomers were not permitted. What appeared to spectators to be a natural environment was, in fact, highly

¹⁶¹ Denis Cosgrove, "Prospect, Perspective, and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series. vol. 10, no. 1 (1985), 55.

¹⁶² Parker, "My Reminiscences." *Strand Magazine*, vol. 38, no. 223 (August 1909), 17.

¹⁶³ "The Sherborne Pageant," *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (15 June 1905), 2.

regulated so as to promote “authentic” forms of spectatorship and community (figures 6 and 7).

Parker’s staging made use of the landscape framed by the audience’s perspective to articulate the relationships between the village and the characters in the pageant. For example, the entrances of performers, as seen in a short film of the pageant, repeated a few basic patterns.¹⁶⁴ Historical characters such as St. Aldhelm and Walter Raleigh entered the playing area from “out of frame,” at a considerable distance, most often on horseback, as if having just arrived in the village. The Narrative Chorus, who otherwise sat near the grandstand, and the invading Danes, who descended from the walls of the castle ruins, likewise entered from outside the landscape framed by the perspective from the grandstands. Whereas these characters appear to arrive in or depart from Sherborne by moving in and out of the “landscape” frame, the performers playing the “crowd” of each episode remain nearly always within the frame. They occupy themselves with raking, sweeping or arranging properties within full view of spectators during the transitions between episodes, and they periodically emerge from within the landscape, appearing from and disappearing behind low walls built out from the ruins. By distinguishing between the entrances of non-folk characters (heroes, foreigners and narrators) and the non-entrances of folk characters, the pageant affirms the authenticity of the bond between Shirburnians, the land and the landscape.

The sense of continuity and of the organic formation of community implied in such staging was extended to the audience in the first moment of the pageant and then repeated throughout the performance. After a bugle call of four heralds, the members of the Narrative Chorus—the choir of male voices Parker identifies as the “voice of history” in the pageant—enter and directly address the thousands of spectators. They ask: “Why have the heralds

¹⁶⁴ “*Mother of All Pageants*”: *The Great Sherborne Folk Play of 1905*, presented by Gerald Pitman (Dorset, UK: Trilith Rural Media, 2008), DVD.

summoned us and why so throng the folk together?”¹⁶⁵ This question not only sets the historical narrative of the pageant in motion, thereby initiating a sense of historical time, it also addresses the present moment, calling upon spectators to look around the arena, recognize their numbers, and join with Shirburnians in accepting the role of the “folk.” It momentarily obscures the performer-spectator boundary in order to absorb both the crowd of performers and the crowd of spectators into a single communal entity from the moment the performance begins.

Echoing the pageant’s opening question, the earth floor on which the pageant was played encouraged spectators’ sense of identification with the landscape and with the performers. One spectator commented that “Green grass is far better than the boards of a playhouse, but when the fresh sward stretches from the spectator’s feet to the ivy-mantled ruins, a sense of reality is imparted to the episodes which is of great importance to the players and stimulates the imagination of the audience.”¹⁶⁶ As this spectator’s comments suggest, the literal “common ground” shared by performers and spectators not only invited the recognition of communal identity, but also emphasized a continuity between Sherborne’s past, embodied by the castle ruins, and its present.

Following Parker’s example, pageant-makers of all kinds placed tremendous value on the availability of ruins when choosing a site (figures 8 and 9). However, ruins were seen as necessary not only for the aura of historicity they impart, but also for their apparent ability to synchronize past and present. For Parker, “Scenes in a pageant convey a thrill no stage can produce when they are represented on the very ground where they took place in real life,” and he

¹⁶⁵ Louis Napoleon Parker, *The Sherborne Pageant; in celebration of the twelve-hundredth anniversary of the founding of the town of Sherborne, the bishopric of Sherborne, & Sherborne school* (Sherborne: Bennett, 1905), 8.

¹⁶⁶ “Impressions of a Visitor,” *Dorset and Somerset Standard*, (29 June 1905), 2.

attempted to include at least one scene of this kind in each of his pageants.¹⁶⁷ In his third pageant at Bury St. Edmund's spectators witnessed a re-enactment of the martyrdom of Saint Edmund on the very ground beneath which, according to legend, his remains had been buried. At Sherborne, Parker was particularly proud of the sixth episode in which "we see Roger of Caen build his Manor Castle, half fortress, half palace, and we suddenly realize that we are looking at the actual stones he set one on the other" (figure 10).¹⁶⁸

Notably, the siege and fall of Sherborne Castle in 1645, during the Civil War, initially formed the subject of a twelfth episode that, according to Parker's original plan, was to appear in the pageant. Although this was a significant moment in Sherborne's history and, moreover, the event that initiated the castle's descent into ruins, the episode was eventually eliminated. Parker's unwillingness in subsequent pageants to include episodes dating forward from the mid-seventeenth century suggests that some Shirburnians may have raised objections to being reminded of the town's Royalist past. Whatever the case may be, the incident supports J.B. Jackson's view of ruins as "places where we can briefly relive the golden age and be purged of historical guilt."¹⁶⁹

For Edwardian pageant spectators, however, ruins were also places where they could re-experience and affirm their own status as modern subjects different from, and yet continuous with the imagined communities of England's past. The ruins of Sherborne Castle served not only to legitimate Sherborne's claim to historical significance but also, in the course of the pageant's performance, to act more generally as a passage between past and present. Receding and proceeding through its arches and crevices, the principal performers (Aldhelm, Raleigh, etc.) and

¹⁶⁷ Parker, *Several of my Lives*, 280.

¹⁶⁸ Parker, quoted in "St. Aldhelm Celebration."

¹⁶⁹ J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins, and other Topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980, 43.

their retinues emerge from the ruins' depths at the beginning of each episode and disappear again at the end. A sequence from the pageant film showing Aldhelm's recessional at the end of Episode One suggests that Parker must have instructed performers to turn their backs towards the grandstand and to keep their attention trained on the departing saint and his followers. On one hand, this technique emphasizes the difference between performers and spectators by spatializing the distance between past and present; on the other, it preserves a sense of connectedness and continuity between stage crowd and arena crowd as both crowds momentarily occupy the same perspectival position in relation to the departing St. Aldhelm.

At certain moments throughout the pageant, however, the boundary between the stage crowd and the arena crowd—suggested only by chalk lines and the grandstand itself—became blurred, and the distance between the ancient ruins and the modern grandstand seemed to collapse. In the seventh episode of the pageant, called "The Quarrel Between the Town and the Monastery," the townspeople of fifteenth-century Sherborne defend against the removal of the font from their parish church. Having won the argument against the Abbott and set his home on fire in celebration, the rioting crowd celebrates by running out from the ruins and directly towards the grandstand. The moment is one of terror and elation, as the performer-spectator boundary threatens to disappear. However, in another superbly handled bit of staging, a single actor at the head of the crowd ends the crush by stopping suddenly, turning towards the townspeople and raising an enormous scroll over his head. He reads a declaration by the Bishop promising Sherborne a new font and a new church. The crowd happily disperses, ending the episode.

The thrill of near collision when there is no real threat of bodily harm may be pleasurable in part because of the reassuring feelings of safety and security that follow. Inasmuch as

Sherborne's visiting crowds may enjoy the excitement of being caught up in the clash between past and present or take delight in imagining themselves as rural townspeople, moments like the one just described serve to remind them that neither, thankfully, are they fourteenth-century peasants lacking any means to assert their rights save rioting and shouting, nor are they, for the most part, residents of present-day Sherborne, compelled to risk their reputations on the amateur stage for the sake of reviving the local economy. Rather, they are endowed with the right of modern spectators *not* to participate, but to passively consume whatever images are presented to them through the theatrical window.

That there is pleasure in experiencing the collisions between city and country, and between history and modernity provided there is some kind of mediating frame, is evident from Sir Lewis Morris's description of leaving Sherborne:

Ten minutes after all was over, while the thunders of applause were still sounding, my young companion and myself were fortunate enough, by executing a rapid strategic movement to the rear amid the solemn stillness of the cedars, to catch the train with its modern dining car on its way to London. Somehow, it was with a certain rude wrench that one parted from the historic past to rejoin the unromantic present. As the long June day waned at last we were whirled swiftly through the beautiful calm landscape, the stately homes of ancient peace, the dewy hayfields, and the twilight woods.¹⁷⁰

Leaving even before the applause is over, Morris and his "young companion" do not even stay to complete the exchange between the pageant's two crowds. They are already on to another modern experience, that of the train dining car, which allows them to simultaneously eat, travel, talk and take in the landscape, not as it is determined by a static, mono-perspectival frame, but as it is seen through the mobile frame of the train's window as it pans across trees, homes and farms.

¹⁷⁰ Sir Lewis Morris, *The New Rambler: from Desk to Platform* (London: Longman's, 1905), 142. Morris, who had attended the Sherborne School as a child, was also invited to write the book of the *Sherborne Pageant*. Like Hardy, he declined.

Training the Crowd: The Work of Performance and the Performance of Work

Anne Janowitz has argued that ruins serve an important dual function in the construction of national imaginaries. As historical sites, they fulfill the educational and patriotic purpose of monuments. As elements of landscape, and therefore part of the natural environment, they enable the transformation of nature into national culture.¹⁷¹ In the case of Sherborne, however, and in many other pageants of the period, the material presence of the ruins also gave substance to the “insubstantial pageant.” The bricks, stones and earth of Edwardian pageant ruins were the “special property of the pageant’s performers and participants, the community of its descendants.”¹⁷² As such, the ruins of Sherborne Castle testified to the existence of a continuous community whose labor had produced artifacts of enduring value. By emphasizing the material presence of the ruins in which it was situated, the Edwardian pageant performed its status as a collaborative work of local craftsmanship.

As in the sixth episode, in which Roger de Caen begins to build Sherborne Castle stone by stone, a moment from Episode One similarly asserted the significance of stone and the effort involved in shaping it into an aesthetic object. During this episode, St. Aldhelm arrives to find “sturdy Britons in wolf-skins” gathered around a massive menhir as their chief prepares a deer for sacrifice. Once Aldhelm has successfully convinced the pagans to return to the Christian path, the men stand the altar on its end and, with chisel and hammer, appear to sculpt an enormous cross. Nearly all of *Sherborne’s* reviewers described this moment as an astonishing act of creative and collective labor, all the more sensational because it was performed in full view of the entire arena without the use of theatrical machinery. It is not only a *coup de théâtre*; it is a reminder that the pageant is the outcome of more than a year of voluntary labor on the part of

¹⁷¹ Anne Janowitz, *England’s Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (London: Blackwell, 1990), 152.

¹⁷² Wallis, 150.

Sherborne's inhabitants.

Making the work of participants visible to spectators was crucial to Edwardian pageantry's aesthetic and social aims. This was true for those who made costumes and properties as well as for those who performed as actors, dancers, and musicians. Indeed, the entire process of preparing the *Sherborne Pageant* constituted a symbolic act of production that was performed for a mass metropolitan audience long before the pageant itself was performed. This performance depended upon the local press, which organized it, and upon the national newspapers and illustrated weeklies that transmitted it to readers. By transforming acts of skilled labor into public performances of "native" industry and ingenuity, Sherborne turned a local celebration into a national spectacle.

What this performance of labor meant for Parker, for the residents of Sherborne, and for readers of London newspapers varied significantly. Parker's vision of the "home-made" pageant insisted on the point that "every article of whatever kind used in the performance must be invented, designed, and made in the town, out of material purchased from local purveyors."¹⁷³ That pageants could inspire creative, joyful labor by respecting the inherent value of local goods and craftsmanship was Parker's sincere hope. Reflecting on the pageants that he created between 1905 and 1909 he wrote:

The amount of previously unsuspected talent discovered in all the towns during the period of preparation was amazing. Everywhere ingenious people rose up out of the earth and made lovely things; also they made them out of the most unpromising and improbable materials. People vied with each other in inventing processes by which something was made out of nothing. A pageant town became, during the year, a hive of artificers, each individual of whom was convinced that the success of the thing depended on the thing he or she was making.¹⁷⁴

Knowing, that costumes and properties were made by hand from local residents and from local

¹⁷³ Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 285-286.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 286-287.

materials could intensify the meaning of the pageant for participants, for the urban visitors who witnessed the pageant and even for those whose experience of the pageant was limited to reading about it in the papers. Serving as the primary means of communication between pageant committees and their members, and between Parker and all of *Sherborne's* participants, the *Dorset and Somerset Standard* printed rehearsal schedules, work and casting requests and more than one hundred other items concerning production details. Beyond its practical function, however, the *Standard* also served as the medium through which the pageant's General Committee communicated the official meaning of pageant work to the residents of Sherborne.

Speaking through the *Standard*, the pageant's General Committee regularly linked the democratic potential of the pageant to the industriousness of its participants. The Chairman of the Committee voiced his hope that "every mother and daughter in Sherborne would put a few stitches towards the making of the costumes that it might be as universal as possible" and urged the pageant's committees to "hammer, hammer, hammer" away in the spirit of "unselfish labor in common cause."¹⁷⁵ Another Committee member predicted that "the pageant would be a great success if but the townspeople with one united effort, will put their shoulders to the wheel."¹⁷⁶

The performance of labor enacted by the residents of Sherborne would not have been nearly as effective had it not been so visible in the national papers. As it happened, however, the "home-made" character of the pageant was mentioned in every article on *Sherborne* appearing in English and American newspapers before, during, and after the pageant. The new illustrated magazines were especially keen to publish photographs of female pageant participants gathered together to make costumes (figure 11). One participant in Parker's *Dover Pageant* (1908) even earned a few weeks of national fame as the woman who fashioned "coats of mail composed of

¹⁷⁵ J.R.P. Goodden, quoted in "The Pageant," *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (9 Feb 1905), 2.

¹⁷⁶ F. Brooke Westcott, quoted in "The Pageant," *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (22 Sept 1904), 2.

key-rings fastened onto cloth, 1700 to each coat.”¹⁷⁷

Like Sherborne’s local paper, British and American national newspapers put a strong spotlight on the purposes of pageant labor. But whereas the *Standard* emphasized civic spirit and economic progress, the national and international press emphasized the loosening of rigid class boundaries and the cultural edification of Sherborne’s rural population. A lengthy passage from an article from *World’s Work Magazine* is representative of the way in which *Sherborne* was interpreted outside of Sherborne:

Mr. Parker had the ready and loyal assistance of the townsfolk, gentle and simple. The zeal with which all the local people, from the great ladies to the girls in the shops and the mills, from the squires to the butchers, bakers, and labourers, are lending a hand, taking part and working too, is not to be surpassed in Oberammergau itself. [. . .] Men and women of all classes have to study, to invent, to design, to make clothes, boots, hats, armor, weapons, and properties of every period. They never heard of them or thought about them before; now they have to learn how to make them, how to use them, how to wear them. They have to learn how to hold themselves, how to move, to walk, to run without being ridiculous, and above all how to speak so as to be heard, without shouting. The people who do all this get a sense of discipline, of obedience, and of drill.¹⁷⁸

The paternalistic undertones in this passage are unmistakable. On one hand, articles such as these helped support *Sherborne* in its efforts to put forth authentic performances of nativeness. The first few sentences here evoke an image of rural life and rural inhabitants as largely unchanged since pre-industrial times. On the other hand, they unwittingly expose the pageant as a canny instrument of behavioral reform. By contrast with Ruskinian ideals of invention and imperfection, London papers emphasized the way in which the *Sherborne Pageant* promoted order, industriousness, social refinement and deference to authority.

Although Parker intended for the acting in *Sherborne* to “seem extemporaneous” and expose “absolutely no sign of drill,” the illustrated press took increasing delight in publishing

¹⁷⁷ *Daily Mirror*, May 23, 1908, 9.

¹⁷⁸ George Turnbull, *World’s Work*, vol. 15, no. 12 (December 1907), 9669-70.

photographs of performers being drilled by Parker and his signature megaphone (figure 12).¹⁷⁹ Despite this, Parker insisted that pageant acting ought to display an unsophisticated, artless charm. “We want sincerity,” Parker told *Sherborne’s* participants. “It’s fine if the acting is naïve, childlike, a little helpless.”¹⁸⁰ The less the acting in the pageant exhibited a professional quality, Parker reasoned, the more the pageant would appear to be rooted in the life of an authentic community. Given that, in fact, only five of Sherborne’s more than eight-hundred performers had ever been on a stage, one critic was left to attribute the “simple, natural, and unforced” quality of the acting in the *Sherborne Pageant* to the rural habitation of its performers.¹⁸¹ Although his remark that “the Dorset peasant is said to take to acting naturally” is delivered tongue-in-cheek, the re-coding of “amateur” acting as “native” and “natural” performance that this critic picks up on was indeed a recurrent strategy of Edwardian pageants—one rooted in the erroneous, but powerful idea of the “folk.”¹⁸²

The mythical life of a folk society, “in which consumption is not separate from production, nor performance from spectating, nor work from leisure,” was often taken as fact in turn-of-the-century England.¹⁸³ Situating the invention of the folk concretely within the logic of the anthropological turn, Georgina Boyes has effectively demonstrated that “the essential difference between the concept of the folk inherent in Romanticism and that presented by the [English Folk revival] lies in the development of the social sciences in the mid-nineteenth century,” and the subsequent creation of Folklore as a discipline combining antiquarian

¹⁷⁹ Parker, quoted in “St. Aldhelm Celebration.”

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ “Historic Pageant at Sherborne,” *The Review of Reviews* vol. 31, no. 186 (Jun 1905), 631.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ J.M. Golby and A.W. Purdue, *The Civilisation of the Crowd: Popular Culture in England: 1750-1900* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1999), 11.

scholarship with anthropological approaches.¹⁸⁴ That the concept of the folk became so widely accepted outside the discipline of Folklore she attributes to its ideological malleability.

Perhaps the thorniest sociopolitical question of the day, to which the invention of the folk offered a heavily veiled response, concerned England's status as an imperial power. If many Victorians and Edwardians believed that "contemporary Britain no longer provided a desirable model to which the 'civilizing mission' and colonized societies should appeal and aspire," mass pageants like *Sherborne* helped to restore ideological reference points for contemporary imperialist ventures.¹⁸⁵ They did so both by attempting to maintain a semblance of genetic continuity between principal performers and the "great men" and women of the past, and by staging the native English crowd as simultaneously natural and civilized.

As was the case in all the mass pageants discussed in the present work (and, in fact, with mass pageants generally) Edwardian pageantry's claim to ensure equal participation of all classes was more than a little exaggerated. Although all Shirburnians were invited to perform in the pageant, the assignment of roles reflected the deeply embedded hierarchical structures of village society.¹⁸⁶ Local notables played the parts of St. Aldhelm, Sir Walter Raleigh, Roger de Caen, William the Conqueror, Queen Osburga, and Queen Elizabeth while crowd parts were given to shop owners and the "respectable" working classes. Central to the logic that permitted what otherwise seemed to be a significant charge against pageantry's democratic aspirations was the idea that the authenticity of a pageant's representation of "heroes and heroines of local history" depended on the genetic proximity of actor to character. Whenever possible, Parker said, the

¹⁸⁴ Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press: 1993), 7.

¹⁸⁵ Dauntton and Rieger, 13.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Woods elaborates on this aspect of the pageant revival in "Performing Power: Local Politics and the Taunton Pageant of 1928," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 25, no. 1 (1999), 57-74.

principal figures in a pageant ought to be played by one of his or her ancestors. Barring that, they “ought to be chosen, first, because they look the part they are to play, next because they have good voices and clear enunciation.”¹⁸⁷

For Parker, the technical ability to perform the role must come second to resembling the character because to do otherwise would undermine the pageant’s claim to historical authenticity and interfere with spectators’ ability to imaginatively participate in the pageant. Rather than creating an unwelcome critical distance between the miscast actor attempting to give a convincing performance and the spectator who cannot help but disbelieve him, Robert Withington contended that when in a pageant we “see famous men . . . doing something which their prototype had done, we can assist at the reproduction of a historical moment.”¹⁸⁸ To be in the audience while an actor who looks like St. Aldhelm (and who is, in actuality, the headmaster of a former monastery school) magnanimously converts pagans to Christianity, becomes a form of participation in Edwardian England’s benevolent civilizing mission. As Joshua Esty aptly warns, “we cannot divorce the effects of imperialism in the colonies from its effects in the center” since British conceptions of self and nation forged in colonial arenas often found their way back into the lives of those who had never left the village.¹⁸⁹ Imperialism therefore remains a significant context even for those works of literature or performance, like pageants, which strategically avoid representing colonial encounters.

Withington’s choice of the word “reproduction” to describe the key difference between the allegorical pageants of the past and the modern Parkerian pageant points to the substantial affiliation between the new pageantry and the still relatively young art of photography. Though

¹⁸⁷ Parker, *Several of my Lives*, 283.

¹⁸⁸ Withington, 213.

¹⁸⁹ Esty, 6.

many of the principal performers in pageants could afford to have their portraits painted—as did the Shirburnians who played St. Aldhelm and Sir Walter Raleigh—many more posed for photographs of themselves in full costume. In Edwardian England, performances given by pageant participants could not be regarded as sufficiently authentic without also being photographically realistic. In her analysis of early twentieth-century photographic surveys, Elizabeth Edwards argues that “photographs solidified tradition in a consumable form.”¹⁹⁰ Deploying the rhetoric of the scientific, photographs “implied that underneath the visible . . . was a complex of vital genetic [and] symbolic connections which reached to the very roots of British identity and by implication, for some participants, imperial greatness.”¹⁹¹ When *Sherborne’s* performers posed for photographs of themselves dressed as medieval villagers and Renaissance performers they not only asserted their own roles in the preservation of imperial authority, in a sense they also transformed Sherborne into a place as vital to the success of contemporary imperial projects as major cities like London and Birmingham.

The particularly large number of portrait photographs of female performers and participants suggests that women, perhaps even more than men, saw pageantry as an opportunity to acquire greater authority and visibility in the present by representing English women of the past. Whether as principal performers, committee members, dancers, singers or costume builders, participation in pageant work was often of special personal significance to female pageanteers.¹⁹² Whereas from about the 1830s onwards women’s participation in traditional or customary performances had been limited to making food, drink, and costumes, women in Edwardian

¹⁹⁰ Elizabeth Edwards, “Straightforward and Ordered: Amateur Photographic Surveys and Scientific Aspiration, 1885–1914,” *Photography & Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Nov 2008), 196.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² See Deborah Sugg Ryan, “Staging the Imperial City: The Pageant of London, 1911” in Felix Driver and David Gilbert, eds. *Imperial Cities, Landscape, Space and Identity* (Manchester, UK: University Press, 1999), 63–82.

pageants not only did the majority of the preparatory work, which mainly involved the construction of properties and costumes rather than set pieces, they also often constituted the largest proportion of performers. For female performers, pageant acting and dancing were not only morally respectable alternatives to acting or dancing on the stage, they were forms of civic engagement. They allowed women, albeit obliquely, to take an active part in public life and to participate “not in party politics perhaps, but in parish pump politics, that which most directly affects women and children.”¹⁹³ For these reasons as well, women were more likely to find opportunities to exercise their artistic skill by becoming pageant-devisers and choreographers rather than professional actor-managers and directors.¹⁹⁴

As was true of men’s participation, local social hierarchies generally dictated how women were assigned roles. The wives of village council members often took the most prominent female roles, of which “Queen Bess” always topped the list. Nevertheless, female performers in less prestigious but often more dramatic roles could also find themselves singled out for admiration. After *Sherborne*, the woman who played a bedraggled and barefoot “madwoman” in the Ninth Episode (“The Dissolution of the Monastery by Henry VIII”) was credited with displaying “considerable dramatic force.”¹⁹⁵ Her success in the role, according to another reviewer, was due to her ability to authentically represent “the angry dismay of the people.”¹⁹⁶

That “madwomen” are particularly capable of expressing the natural feelings of the

¹⁹³ “Warwick’s Great Pageant-Play,” 5.

¹⁹⁴ The most well-known female pageant-deviser was Mary Kelly who staged pageants throughout the 1930s. See Mick Wallis, “Unlocking the Secret Soul: Mary Kelly, Pioneer of Village Theatre,” *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 16, no.4 (Nov 2000), 347-358.

¹⁹⁵ “The Historical Drama at Sherborne.” *Review of Reviews*, vol. 32, no. 187 (9 Jul 1905), 33.

¹⁹⁶ “A Unique Historical Drama,” *Public Opinion*, vol. 39, no. 6, (3 Aug 1905), 183.

irrational, enraged crowd appears to have been a belief shared by pageant-devisers across Europe and the United States. In numerous mass pageants, wailing and hysterical women take center stage to perform the emotional life of the crowd at the peak of its oppression. They represent the wreckage of poverty, war, and disease—all the social ills that the nation must find a way to overcome if it is to avoid impending mass violence and revolution. In *Sherborne*, as in other pageants discussed in the present work, the “madwoman” or “hag” character takes on the burden of representing the crowd in its most chaotic and disempowered state, thereby allowing the majority of performers to continue to represent the crowd at its most rational and joyful.

From the crowds of all twelve episodes in the *Sherborne Pageant*, Parker demanded performances of spontaneous, unaffected and seemingly unconscious expressions of collective self-affirmation. In fact, *Sherborne*’s reviewers found the crowds to be the most compelling part of the performance. One wrote that “the alert, intelligent, and interested demeanor of the crowd is the most remarkable thing in the performance” while another concurred that “the crowds were lively, spontaneous, and full of movement.”¹⁹⁷ Yet another remarked that, “Instead of the chaos natural to the presence of large bodies of untrained actors, we saw a crowd of which each individual member, man, woman, or child, seemed to be informed with the very spirit of the scene represented.”¹⁹⁸ This last comment hints at a particularly important point. The performing crowds of *Sherborne* are not “untrained actors,” but rather “trained amateurs.” They are a crowd that can never turn into a mob because each individual has been made to understand that his or her performance should not *be* natural (i.e. chaotic), but should rather *seem* natural so that the pageant may represent reality without courting the dangers inherent in the actual processes of crowd formation.

¹⁹⁷ “A Unique Historical Drama;” “The Historical Drama at Sherborne.”

¹⁹⁸ A.E. “A Notable Experiment,” *The Speaker* (8 July 1905), 342.

Furthermore, the usefulness of the idea of the “trained crowd” is that it introduces some measure of flexibility and contingency into the rigid binary roles upon which colonial narratives are typically predicated—native/colonizer, barbarian/civilizer—instead portraying these qualities as all equally accessible through the performance of English folk crowds. For late Victorians and Edwardians, England’s colonies produced crowds that were a source of admiration as well as revulsion. Whereas it had long been commonplace for English writers to claim that their fellow citizens had little taste for ceremonial, the Indian continent, by contrast, was seen as a place “where enormous congregations are everywhere to be seen on festival days,” and where daily life depended upon ceremonies enlisting the “imagination of thousands of the faithful.”¹⁹⁹ To a certain degree, Edwardians envied the displays of mass devotion evident in photographs of the Hindu Kumbh Mela, which *Strand Magazine* writer, Jeremy Broome, featured in his 1898 article on “Crowds.” At the same time, however, they were contemptuous of the fanaticism of oriental crowds with their excessive “commotion, clatter, and cries.”²⁰⁰

Pageants presented the English folk as operating comfortably in simultaneously native and civilized modes of performance, as religious but not fanatical, traditional but not hidebound, spirited but not chaotic. Pageantry’s folk are capable of collective acts of selflessness (like participating in pageants) to express their patriotic spirit, but not to the point of “abnormal self-injury” like Indian fakirs, or irrational “sacrifice of the necessities of life” like the Hindu pilgrims who spend months of their income to attend the Mela. The ideal crowd represented in the role of the folk in Edwardian pageants is ideal in that it presents no threat to the dominant social order. In fact, it helps to sustain its ideological core.

While celebrating the local, pageants served national and imperial aims. While ensuring

¹⁹⁹ Jeremy Broome, “Crowds,” *Strand Magazine*, vol. 16, no. 95 (Nov 1898), 559.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 560.

the participation of all classes, they re-inscribed established social hierarchies. While asserting the value of pageantry as a distinctly noncommercial enterprise, pageants promoted new modes of interaction between producers and consumers. And, while seeming to confirm the existence of polar differences between the folk and the crowd, pageants such as *Sherborne* became significant not merely as “authentic” representations of the English past, but as sites of crowd performance where new versions of Englishness could be generated, reproduced and commodified.

Contrast without Conflict: Consumerism, Candids and the Crowd

Key to understanding the processes at work in Edwardian pageantry’s complex renegotiation of the modern crowd is that which Alex Owen discusses in terms of the “new conception of the self” in turn-of-the-century England. She argues that in this period the idea of the “psychologized self” begins gradually to supersede the post-Enlightenment conception of a conscious, autonomous self or rationally constructed “I.” In place of “the sense of self as a single applied consciousness,” Owen writes, “was a variously conceived but invariably fragmented or multiple self.” According to this model of selfhood, “the idea of rationality as that which illuminates and brings coherence to the whole . . . was replaced by a sense of the limits of rationality and the impossibility of integrating all the elements of the self in one illuminated moment.”²⁰¹ For Owen, the psychologized self produces a newly problematized subjectivity, one that members of the Golden Dawn and the other modern mystical orders that are her focus did not so much reject as attempt to transcend via the development of occult beliefs and practices.

Edwardian pageantry’s response to the emergence of the psychologized self was not entirely dissimilar to the response offered by elite occultists insofar as pageants attempted to achieve *collective* transcendence through a similarly dense complex of ideas and practices

²⁰¹ Alexandra Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 115-116.

combining embodiment, myth and historical memory. Edwardian occultism and Edwardian pageantry both attempted to assuage underlying anxieties about the contingent nature of modern selfhood by redirecting participants towards visions of individual and social wholeness and by encouraging them to act always *as if* they inhabited such visions.

For pageant-makers, however, the problem of the psychologized was particularly challenging. If, as Owen suggests, Edwardians were becoming aware of the difficulty of integrating all the fragments and multiple versions of the self, how much more difficult would it be to integrate immense crowds made up of hundreds and thousands of individuals into a coherent social totality? New conceptions of the self in Edwardian England consequently created a demand for new conceptions of the crowd that would incorporate rather than reject the idea of fragmented and multiple selves.

Despite the commitment of pageant-devisers like Parker to the idea that pageantry would restore a sense of rationality and coherence to the social order, pageant participants and observers found their own ways to use pageants to celebrate rather than to correct the habits of the multivarious modern crowd. Just as the rules that determined what did or did not count as legitimate in polite occult circles did not prevent illicit practices from taking place on their periphery, pageantry's prescriptive version of communal life only extended as far as the limits of the pageant grounds. On its margins, extemporaneous performances of the crowd's modernity were caught in the lenses of the new snapshot cameras and published in illustrated newspapers like the *Daily Mirror*. "Curious Contrasts" pages—photographic spreads depicting pageant participants engaged in modern pursuits such as riding bicycles, waiting for omnibuses in the rain, and smoking cigarettes while half-dressed in Renaissance and Medieval costumes—offered new ways of imagining the crowd (figures 13, 14 and 15).

In *Daily Mirror* photo spreads from three 1907 pageants—the *Romsey Pageant*, the *Oxford Pageant* and the *St. Alban's Pageant*—performers wittingly and unwittingly enact their status as modern subjects.²⁰² At Oxford, two women in Elizabethan dress are seen on an omnibus while a man in similar garb rides a “1907 model” bicycle in the street. At all three pageants, partially-costumed players exhibit eclectic new fashions mixing bowlers with medieval armor, “Regent Street hats” with powdered wigs, nun’s habits with heeled boots, Saxon cowls with umbrellas, handbags with helmets and royal robes with overcoats. The *Mirror’s* cameras catch fully-costumed pageant participants smoking cigarettes, while pagans and monks of antiquity wield cameras and cinematographs of their own.

The pageant players of the *Daily Mirror’s* “curious contrasts” pages effortlessly occupy past and present, straddling local and national, as well as rural and urban versions of Englishness. Apart, however, from their ability to perform fragmented and multiple identities without any apparent discomfort or anxiety, what allows the *Mirror* to represent these individuals as a recognizably *modern* crowd, are the conveniences and conveyances they employ. The bowler, the handbag, the umbrella, the cigarette, the omnibus and the camera—all these supersede class position, occupation and place of birth as markers of modern selfhood. The conception of the self that is represented in these photographs is not an outgrowth of tradition; nor, however, is it the result of modern psychology. Rather, the selves seen in the *Mirror’s* “contrast” photos are extensions of consumer culture.

On one hand, the kind of consumption seen in these photos is what Jonathan Friedman calls “an expression of a self-directed strategy in which the free floating subject attempts to

²⁰² The *Romsey Pageant* was devised by Frank Benson. The *Oxford Pageant* was devised by Frank Lascelles. The *St. Alban's Pageant* was devised by Herbert Jarman.

create a world in which he can anchor his identity.”²⁰³ Even when the pageant player is in “native” costume the stability of his identity as a “respectable citizen” of modern England is assured by his possession of handbag, cigarette or bowler. On the other hand, this consumption is also “other-directed.”²⁰⁴ A pageant player who recognize himself as part of the modern crowd consciously consumes one or more folk identities from an imagined past by dressing up and playing the part for a limited period of time. In doing so, he “expresses a romantic longing to *become* another in an existential situation where whatever one becomes must eventually be disenchanted by the knowledge that all identity is an arrangement of man-made products, thus an artifice.”²⁰⁵

As Outka explains however, artifice need not indicate a loss of authentic identity; rather, it can generate new avenues for self-expression. The published, commercially available snapshot has the potential to turn an average citizen into a temporary celebrity, however minor—one whose commodity is herself, that is to say, the self that she creates and performs for a viewing public. The selves at the center of all these contrast photographs possess a significant value for the consumer—the *Daily Mirror* buyer—not because they cleverly disprove the authenticity of the pageant but because they generate an appealing paradox: modern selfhood as a mix of psychology and commodity, tradition and novelty.

The category of the “contrast” is one that the *Daily Mirror* may have adapted from A.W.N. Pugin’s 1836 book, *Contrasts; or, a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, and Similar Building of the Present Day; Shewing the*

²⁰³ Jonathan Friedman, “Consuming Desires: Strategies of Selfhood and Appropriation,” *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 2 (May 1991), 158.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Present Decay of Taste: Accompanied by Appropriate Text. In its several chapters and accompanying illustrations Pugin, a well-known architect and proponent of the Gothic Revival style, plays on a familiar Ruskinian strain. Whereas fourteenth- and fifteenth-century edifices were, he argues, a result of “the faith, the zeal, and, above all, the unity” of a people sincerely devoted to a single idea of Christianity, nineteenth-century buildings have been designed and constructed merely for the “applause and admiration of mankind.”²⁰⁶

What Pugin finds even more appalling than lack of common enterprise or religious purpose, however, is that the modern architectural design seems to be “entirely ruled by whim and caprice.”²⁰⁷ Among the more detestable examples of absurdity and incongruity he makes note of are “a Turkish kremlin for a royal residence; Greek temples in crowded lanes; [and] Egyptian auction rooms.”²⁰⁸ Even in London’s most “fashionable” areas—Regent’s Park and Regent’s Street—he finds “all kinds of styles jumbled up together to make up a mass.”²⁰⁹ In an Appendix to the text, Pugin supplies hand-drawn sketches of “contrasts,” an example of an edifice or architectural detail from the past on one page, and its equivalent in the present on the facing page. Most of Pugin’s contrasts are designed to demonstrate “the decay of taste,” but others aim their critique more broadly at popular distortions of formerly sacred subjects. In one, a Gothic architectural element featuring a solemn bishop is set alongside a poorly rendered memorial to a would-be man of God, who apparently had been married twice (figure 16). In the space to the left of the monument hangs a sign that reads “Persons are desired not to walk about and talk during divine service nor to deface the wall.” Clearly visible in the background on the

²⁰⁶ Pugin, A.W.N. *Contrasts* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), 2.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

right are the outline of a hand as well as initials and other scribbles.

What it meant to juxtapose images of pre-industrial England with images of modern England evidently underwent a significant change between 1836 and 1906. Whereas Pugin's contrasts participate in a well-known narrative of national decline, the *Daily Mirror* contrasts aim to project a carnivalesque version of modernity, one in which the contrast itself, rather than the objects contrasted, becomes the focal point of consumer desire. If for Pugin the disenchantments of modernity are evident in the contrasts between objects of relative permanence—buildings and monuments—for the *Daily Mirror*, the idea of contrast is embodied in transitory performances caught in the camera's lens. In the development from the latter to the former, what it means to be English begins to shift from the monumental mode's insistence on unity and immutability, to a performative mode in which heterogeneity and ephemerality are not only encouraged, but celebrated.

The most obvious difference, of course, between Pugin's contrasts and those of the *Daily Mirror* is that the former are carefully hand-drawn sketches meant to be enshrined on English bookshelves, while the latter are disposable newspaper photographs intended to create an immediate, and short-term effect. The *Daily Mirror* images are not only photographs, but "snapshots" and, more specifically, "candid." Discussing the emergence of candid photography in England, Nicholas Hiley explains that in the last years of the nineteenth century, "the development of faster photographic emulsions led to the production of practical hand cameras, by which a picture could be taken without its subject even knowing that a camera was present. By 1895 photographs were spreading rapidly through the illustrated magazines [and] the launch of new illustrated papers such as the *Daily Mirror* in 1904 raised candid photography to the

status of an art.”²¹⁰

Candid snapshots proved to be a crucial technology of the Edwardian crowd. In part because of their link with science, photographs “enabled the category of Englishness to be caught in snap-shot or freeze-frame and rendered as stable, secure, and coherent.”²¹¹ That the *Mirror*’s “curious contrast” pages typically display multiple, arranged and ordered instances of past/present juxtapositions suggest to the consumer the idea that “contrast” is a characteristic peculiar not only to individual pageant performers, but to pageant crowds more generally. By featuring a different pageant in each of its weekly editions, the *Mirror* effectively brackets the particularity (and hence the significance) of place to an ideal of Englishness, and instead makes visible the more marketable category of modernity. In doing so, it allows its consumers to reimagine the life of the modern English crowd as one of contrast without conflict. Consumption, then, becomes a strategy for incorporating fragmented, multiple and isolated selves into a new version of social life.

Conclusion

Pugin’s narrative of decline was wholly in keeping with the ethos of the Arts and Crafts movement with which most pageant supporters claimed to be in sympathy. Although one might assume that the appearance of contrast photos in the press would have profoundly irritated pageant-devisers such as Parker who purported to value the illusion of historical authenticity above all else, neither Parker nor anyone else seems to have offered any criticism of contrast photographs or attempted to control their dissemination in the press. In fact, Parker’s autobiography tells a number of contrast anecdotes that seem to enliven rather than distract the

²¹⁰ Nicholas Hiley. “The Candid Camera of the Edwardian Tabloids,” *History Today*, vol. 43 (Aug 1993), 16.

²¹¹ James Vernon, “Englishness: the Narration of a Nation,” *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Apr 1997), 243.

crowds of participants and spectators. In one of these, a large kite-balloon rising above the home of a local shop owner flies in full view of a pageant audience directly over the center of the arena until someone can be sent to have it cut down. According to Parker the banner attached to it read, “‘How’s your Liver? Try Bleachem’s Pills” or words to that effect.’”²¹²

If the absurdities and incongruities of Edwardian pageantry were treated with affectionate humor by both the *Mirror* and by pageant-devisers like Parker, pageant films of the period are equally, if not more generous in their treatment of pageant crowds. The film of the *Sherborne Pageant* (an abridged eighteen-minute version of the event) looks something more like a “home movie” of a large English family than a historical document. In fact, it entirely erases the twelve-member “narrative chorus,” which Parker referred to as the “voice of history in a pageant,” focusing instead on the scenes with the largest numbers of Shirburnians: scenes of feasting, dancing, rioting and ceremony. With the historical frame almost entirely removed, the narrative continuity that Parker strove to achieve is lost in the editing. What remains, however, are the pageant’s crowds. In the final episode of the pageant, called “the March past,” which occupies a considerable part of the short film, nearly all of Sherborne seems to walk past the camera. Some of the performers attempt to uphold the *gravitas* of their assigned roles, but most are seen cheering, laughing, chatting with their fellow performers and waving to spectators in the grandstands.

For Sherborne’s residents, any camaraderie they may have earned by re-enacting the life of the merry folk of England did not manage to survive even six weeks after the pageant closed. *The Standard*’s “Editor’s Letter Bag” section hosted a heated public debate about what to do with the pageant’s considerable profit. A number of citizens, including one calling himself PRO BONO PUBLICO asserted that the decision as to how to use the funds should be “submitted to a

²¹² Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 299.

Poll and thus by a majority of the voice of the people settled.”²¹³ The chair of the Pageant Committee, however, responded that “the disposal of the balance was a very difficult matter. It seemed to him, therefore, that they must settle the matter speedily and that it must be settled by a small body.” Although “the money had been spoken of as being public money,” he added, “he did not think it should be described quite in that way.”²¹⁴ Suggestions for its use included contributions towards the building of a new hotel, the establishment of a historical library and the development of an amateur opera society. In the end, the pageant’s profit went towards the design and planting of formal public gardens, the construction of a bandstand and the creation of a stone monument commemorating *Sherborne* as “the Mother of all Pageants.” The Pageant Gardens, the bandstand and the commemorative stone are all still to be found in Sherborne.

Less permanent was the sense of local patriotism that the yearlong process of creating the pageant had inspired. One letter-writer to *the Standard* wrote:

The town has settled down once more to its self-complacency. The Pageant has faded, apparently never to be revived, and the good folk of the town take as little interest in their historical surroundings as they did before the burst of enthusiasm which introduced them to the world. . . I suppose we must settle down for another further period of sleep, until another Cromwell visits us or another Louis Parker awakens us.²¹⁵

Although Louis Napoleon Parker went on to create five more major pageants, the tremendous expenditure of energy demanded by them induced him to return to the conventional stage, leaving pageant work to the many others who had entered the field since the success of *Sherborne*. Although Parker has little good to say about the work of other pageant-devisers in his autobiography, the heights of his contempt (and the heights of his wit) are reserved for the

²¹³ “Editor’s Letter Bag,” *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (2 Aug 1905), 3.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, “What Sherborne Needs,” *Dorset and Somerset Standard* (31 Aug 1905), 3.

“speculators [that] began to try to commercialize pageants” (figure 17):²¹⁶

[Once] advertising crept in . . . pageants, having sacrificed most of the attributes which should characterize them, got into bad odour. Then the word Pageant was affixed to almost everything. I collected such curiosities as a Pageant of Rain; a Pageant of Sunshine; a Pageant of Motor-cycles; a Pageant of Fog; a Pageant of Summer Hats; and this masterpiece: a Pageant of Lingerie. As for poor me, I could not produce a modest little play but it was dubbed a Pageant; and I do believe that if I had presented a monologue to be spoken before a curtain by a gentleman in evening dress, it would have been described as a Pageant of Glad Rags.²¹⁷

The “new pageantry,” became more explicitly commercial, patriotic and even jingoistic in the years just before and during the First World War. A strong indication that village pageantry had run its course was the 1921 *Hendon Air Pageant* in which spectators were treated to the sight of airplanes in formation bombing a dummy village—complete with a restaurant, a church and scores of fleeing villagers—until nothing was left but smoke and flame (figure 18). Nevertheless, the optimism that necessarily underlies every work of pageantry carried the genre safely into the 1920s and 30s. In those decades, a new generation of pageant-devisers—many of them traditionalists like Parker, but also many socialists and labor activists—would draw not only on the examples of *Sherborne* and its successors, but also on the more experimental and technological pageant forms that had begun to appear in the United States and Soviet Russia.

One of the last performers to appear in Parker’s *Sherborne Pageant* was his own daughter in the role of the town of “Sherbourne, Massachusetts.” Taking the hand of an older woman—a performer playing England’s “Sherborne”—she and her partner enacted the transmission of history and culture from a senior nation to its chosen heir. Episodes like this one were imitated widely in English pageants after *Sherborne* and they inspired American tourists summering in England during 1906 and 1907 to try out the idea of pageantry on home ground. The “new

²¹⁶ Parker, *Several of My Lives*, 298-99.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 299.

pageantry” movement, as it came to be called, emerged in 1908 as the result of barely-concealed yearnings on the part of the American upper classes to imitate the successes of the Edwardians. Although most pageant-devisers in the United States followed the traditional models of their English counterparts, the deviser of the 1914 *Masque of St. Louis*, the symbolist poet and playwright Percy MacKaye, had little inclination to follow anything other than his own vision. Larger than any spectacle previously produced in the United States, the *Masque of St. Louis* offered MacKaye, and indeed the entire American pageantry movement, an opportunity to find out to what extent MacKaye’s compelling vision of theater as a “conscious awakening of a people to self-government” could in fact be realized.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre*, 15.

Chapter Three
Saint Louis Addresses the Multitude: Crowds and Publics in the *Masque of St. Louis*

*Saint Louis . . . ascends and takes the Sword. Standing before the temple shrine,
he turns and looks below. . . [He addresses] the multitude:*

O sisters – brothers – cities leagued by Love!
If we are dreaming, let us scorn to wake;
Or waking, let us shape the sordid world
To likeness of our dreams . . .

Percy MacKaye, *Saint Louis, a Civic Masque*²¹⁹

Over the course of five days and nights at the end of May 1914, more than 8,000 residents of St. Louis, Missouri dressed up as Indians, Pioneers, and a host of allegorical figures—Gold, Poverty, and Imagination among them—in order to enact the “life drama” of their city before over half a million spectators (figure 19). The *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*, often hailed as the crowning achievement of the American Pageantry movement, epitomized for one its more well-known spectators, George Pierce Baker, “what this drama of the masses may do for the masses.”²²⁰ Edward Gordon Craig was rather more cynical. Six weeks earlier, in a letter to the *Masque’s* creator, Percy MacKaye, Craig politely regrets not being able to attend, but does not hesitate to add, “Personally I think MacKaye that your idea of the democratic spirit giving birth to anything like fine art is ‘all my eye and Betty Martin’”—British slang for utter, absolute nonsense.²²¹

²¹⁹ Percy MacKaye, *Saint Louis, a Civic Masque*, 78.

²²⁰ George Pierce Baker, “The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis.” *World’s Work*, vol. 28 (Aug 1914), 389-399. Though most widely known for his theater scholarship, Baker was a prominent advocate of pageantry as well as a pageant director. His pageant work is discussed in Naima Prevots, *American Pageantry: a Movement for Art and Democracy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990).

²²¹ Edward Gordon Craig to Percy MacKaye, 13 April 1914 (PMK Papers); Jonathon Green, *Cassell’s Dictionary of Slang, 2nd Edition* (London: Orion, 2005), 18. On Craig and MacKaye, see Susan Valeria Harris Smith, *Masks in Modern Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 49-84. Despite their occasional disagreements, MacKaye and Craig were lifelong friends and correspondents. Craig referred to MacKaye as “the one man [American artists] can, should and must rally round” (letter from Craig to MacKaye on 12 Jan 1910, PMK Papers).

As the best known, if not the only, self-declared American symbolist of the early twentieth century, Percy MacKaye had earned a well-established reputation as a poet, dramatist, and theorist.²²² Although the *New York Times* described him as “a dramatist of the select and best nurtured of those who will quote Bergson over the demi-tasse” MacKaye himself yearned to become a “dramatist of the multitude.”²²³ Throughout the course of his long career, he insisted that symbolist theatrical practices rejecting naturalistic detail in favor of abstract scenography, allegory and stylized gesture, were not incompatible, as Craig believed, with “rituals of democracy”—mass pageants cultivating “the half-desire of the people not merely to remain receptive to a popular art created by specialists but to take part themselves in creating it.”²²⁴

By enjoining his fellow American dramatists “to illumine and body forth the life of the people in perennial symbols of power and beauty,” MacKaye pointed to a convergence of symbolist aesthetics and populist sentiment that was a unique aspect of the American New Pageantry movement in which MacKaye was a prominent figure.²²⁵ David Glassberg’s *American Pageantry: the Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* is, to date, the only published

while MacKaye frequently spoke on Craig’s theories during his lecture tours and regularly contributed to Craig’s journal, *The Mask*.

²²² Though he occupied many of the same artistic and dramatic circles as his contemporary, Eugene O’Neill, MacKaye was an ardent adversary of naturalism on the American stage. He idolized the Belgian poet and playwright, Maurice Maeterlinck, but considered most other European playwrights, including Ibsen and Yeats, too elitist and too melancholy for the American temperament. Though in his early career he was well-known as a playwright, his later, post-pageant career was distinguished primarily by his many published collections of poetry. On MacKaye and his illustrious family see E.O. Grover, ed. *Annals of an Era: Percy MacKaye and the MacKaye Family* (Washington D.C.: Pioneer Press, 1932).

²²³ Moderwell, X9.

²²⁴ Percy MacKaye, quoted in Kilmer, 314.

²²⁵ Letter from Percy MacKaye to Grenville Vernon, 12 March 1907 (PMK Papers). MacKaye’s work in the masque genre predated the rise of the pageantry movement. The *Saint-Gaudens Masque*, performed at the Cornish Art Colony in 1905, was MacKaye’s first critical success. MacKaye’s first pageant was performed at Gloucester, Massachusetts in August 1909 and, though it never materialized, he developed a pageant for Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1910. MacKaye remained a member of the American Pageantry Association’s Board of Directors until its disappearance in 1930.

work to offer a substantive discussion of *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*.²²⁶ Though Glassberg does take note of the *Masque*'s significance as a work of theater, his central concern is the way in which it offers insight into Progressive Era conceptions of public history. As such, his analysis provides both a complex examination of the sociopolitical circumstances in which the *Masque* was performed as well as a richly imagined reconstruction of the events of the performance itself. Despite his interest in MacKaye as an artist, Glassberg nevertheless steers clear of an examination of the array of performance strategies in the *Masque*. This chapter, by contrast, looks at the *Masque* as a multi-layered performance text that attempts to generate a new conception of national community by joining theatrical practices associated with European symbolism to contemporary American theories of crowd psychology. It argues that the proliferation of "national crowd symbols" in the *Masque of St. Louis* served a principal ambition of Progressive Era reformism—to transform primitive, aimless crowds into civilized, modernized publics—while also providing MacKaye and his collaborators with an immense laboratory in which to conduct experiments in narrative form, stagecraft and collective dreaming.

Pageantry, Progressivism and the Need for National Symbols

In the first two decades of the twentieth century the American Pageantry movement sought to achieve no less than the complete transformation of society through the making of mass pageants: vast open-air dramas combining history and allegory, in which hundreds of thousands of people of diverse economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds participated not only as spectators, but as performers. Whereas Edwardian pageantry (discussed in Chapter Two) produced a "pageantitis" epidemic that spread throughout the United Kingdom, American

²²⁶ Though David Glassberg's *American Pageantry* currently serves as the primary reference for all scholarship on MacKaye's *Masque*, two dissertations also consider the event in some detail from different perspectives: See also Kenneth Graeme Bryant, "Percy MacKaye and the Drama of Democracy," PhD diss., University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1991 (ProQuest AAT 9200131) and Michael Peter Mehler, "Percy MacKaye: Spatial Formations of a National Character," PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2010 (ProQuest AAT 3417299).

pageantry went well beyond this, giving rise to a self-described “movement” in 1908 and then, in 1913, to a national organization, the American Pageant Association (APA).²²⁷ By 1915, Thomas Dickinson would devote more than half of his book, *The Case of American Drama*, to a study of pageantry’s twin objectives: to restore a sense of “vibrant mass consciousness” to a society rent by the privations and attractions of modern life, and to spur the development of authentic forms of American drama.²²⁸ “Ten years ago,” Dickinson writes, reflecting on the movement’s rapid expansion, “the pageant was known only as an obsolete ceremonial, continued in the vestiges of the street parade, the carnival, and the secret-society ritual. [. . .] It is now a commonplace that the pageant is a potent instrument in the social programme.”²²⁹

The development of pageantry was, for Dickinson and others, also an important step towards the Americanization of the American theater. Pageantry held out the hope of a uniquely American dramatic form that would set itself apart from the increasingly psychological drama of Europe. Safeguarding the American psyche against European drama’s apparent obsession with self-analysis, the pageant, says Dickinson, is “common, democratic, universal, not too subtle, yet capable of a strong and dignified beauty, a clear and trumpet message. [. . .] It is American because it permits the use of the many . . . and it gives no place to the sickly, the sentimental or the introspective.”²³⁰ Likewise for MacKaye, pageantry was a “third theater” offering a much-needed alternative to both the pessimistic “segregated drama” of Ibsen, and to the fragmentary,

²²⁷ A bibliography of contemporary works on American pageantry is available in Caroline Hill Davis, *Pageants in Great Britain and the United States: a List of References* (New York: New York Public Library Association, 1916). The American Pageant Association (APA), founded in 1913, was organized for the purposes of protecting the new genre from commercialization, disorganization and low aesthetic standards. Its founding and development of the APA is discussed in Prevots, *American Pageantry*.

²²⁸ Thomas H. Dickinson, *The Case of American Drama* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1915), 53.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

“neurasthenic” character of the vaudeville stage.²³¹

Although the “new pageantry” as it was often called, had made its debut in 1908, with an “English-style” pageant at Philadelphia, only three years later it had developed into a genre encompassing diverse interests, communities, and aesthetic forms. Pageant-advocates “spanned the ideological spectrum from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW),” and the artistic spectrum from thoroughgoing realists like William Dean Howells to MacKaye, a self-described “banner-waving” symbolist.²³² Attempts to list the number of events called “pageants” produced frustrating results for pageantry’s many chroniclers. One boasted that “a map of the United States dotted at every point where a pageant has blossomed . . . might be as thickly speckled as a fertile meadow in the season of dandelions.”²³³ Less poetically, theater historian Robert Withington diagnosed the country in 1918 as “pageant-mad,” claiming that most Americans had by then seen, if not taken part in, at least one pageant.²³⁴

Like English pageants of the same period, American pageants were non-profit enterprises requiring large-scale, voluntary, local participation and open-air stages. American pageant-devisers often made the claim, however, that their pageants were more artistically innovative and socially progressive than their English counterparts. Whereas English pageants documented the actualities of history in static pictures in order to explain the past, American pageants reinvented and reorganized historical materials in dynamic ways in order to “look out upon and construct

²³¹ Martin Green, *New York, 1913: the Armory Show and the Paterson Strike Pageant* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 165.

²³² Glassberg, 105; “Percy MacKaye on the Poetic Drama,” *Theatre Magazine*, vol. 20, (Nov 1914), 222-25.

²³³ Ralph Davol, *Handbook of American Pageantry* (Taunton, Mass.: Davol Publishing, 1914), 11.

²³⁴ Withington, 235.

the future.”²³⁵ Progressive Era reformers cast pageantry’s ability to shape the future in both idealistic and utilitarian terms. W.E.B. Du Bois’ excited pronouncement, “Nothing can stop it. It is. It will. Wonderfully, irresistibly the dream comes true,” echoed the aspirations of those who saw pageants as augural rites that inevitably would give shape to a genuine democratic social order.²³⁶ Other, less utopian progressives championed pageants as pragmatic tools for achieving immediate political reforms deemed essential to the success of various modernization schemes. Regarded as a highly flexible and accommodating genre, pageantry could be fitted to almost any purpose, though it was nearly always associated with “progressive” causes and ideals.²³⁷

The organizers of the *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* not only claimed that it would inspire a new sense of unity in a city with an increasingly heterogeneous population composed of “old” and “new” immigrant groups, they also believed it would convince enfranchised St. Louisans to vote in favor of an unpopular new city charter.²³⁸ Two months prior to the *Masque*, a cartoon depicted its central symbol, the sword of Saint Louis, pointing to a “New Charter” awaiting its rescue from a peak just approaching the sun of “Civic Perfection” (figure 20).

²³⁵ Percy MacKaye, “Worcester Address on Pageantry,” (26 Feb 1912), PMK Papers.

²³⁶ W.E.B. DuBois, quoted in David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theater, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 84. DuBois’ 1913 pageant, *The Star of Ethiopia*, was performed by a cast of more than 1,000 in New York, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. On Ethiopia see (in addition to Krasner, 81-94) Alessandra Lorini, *Rituals of Race: American Public Culture and the Search for Racial Democracy* (Charlottesville: Virginia University Press, 1999), 220-225; and Susan Kay Gillman, *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003): 148-199.

²³⁷ Most useful to my analysis of the relationship between pageantry and Progressive Era reformism have been Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: the Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds. *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1991); and Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

²³⁸ Though census data from the time does not make it entirely clear who was counted in which categories, the “foreign-born” population of the city of St. Louis did not increased significantly in the period between 1890 and 1910. However, the 1890 census shows, for the first time, persons born in Bohemia, Russia, Poland, Italy, Hungary, China and Mexico composing a percentage of that population nearing previous numbers of the “foreign-born” from England, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, France, Switzerland, and Germany.

Calling for the creation of a downtown plaza, the construction of a new bridge, and the re-zoning of the city, St. Louis Civic League members who had led the charter campaign in 1911 had, at the time, represented it as a boon to business owners and real estate developers. After it was rejected, one Civic League member explained that he and his colleagues had been unable to convince city residents from economically and ethnically diverse neighborhoods to support a bill that, as they believed, benefited St. Louis as a whole.²³⁹ Reinvented in 1914 as the St. Louis Pageant Drama Association (SLPDA), the Civic League hoped the event would “influence and control the emotions of the masses that their civic activity will be along proper lines,” convincing voters to pass the charter bill, which was now recast as a necessary step in the transformation of St. Louis into a model of civic unity as well as a prosperous modern metropolis.²⁴⁰ That a mass pageant would influence the voting habits of a diverse population more efficiently and effectively than direct campaigning had done was the great hope of the pageant’s organizers.

By 1914 St. Louis had already been the site of many monumental celebrations including the 1904 World’s Fair and Olympic Games, the 1904 Democratic National Convention and the 1909 Centennial of the city’s incorporation. Whether in an effort to surpass its own recent history of mass performances or to outdo other cities in the United States that had recently hosted mass pageants, the SLPDA made a bold decision when it agreed to MacKaye’s plan for a colossal double-feature. According to MacKaye’s letter of proposal to the SLPDA, pageant-deviser and art historian Thomas Wood Stevens would write and direct a historical pageant, to take place during daylight hours, in which participants would reenact episodes from the city’s past in as

²³⁹ Charles Stix, quoted in Glassberg, 162.

²⁴⁰ Luther Gulick, quoted in Glassberg, 199. On the St. Louis charter see Eric Sandweiss, *St. Louis: the Evolution of an American Urban Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 183-230.

much fully realized, naturalistic detail as possible.²⁴¹ Its dialogue would be “more or less literal” and “important persons” from the city’s history would be represented. Immediately following Stevens’ realistic pageant, MacKaye’s *Masque*, set to begin at nightfall, would reinterpret the narrative of the *Pageant* in the mode of symbolism, employing verse, choral dialogue, and an abstract setting. In place of historical events, spectators would meet the allegorical figures of War, Poverty, and Gold. In place of historical characters, symbolic figures such as Saint Louis and Cahokia would serve as “the spokesmen of great mass groupings.” MacKaye’s close collaborator, Joseph Lindon Smith, would direct the *Masque* and Frederick Converse would compose music for both parts of the event. In the end, the combined *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* would take more than five hours to perform.

Although the American Pageant Association defined the masque as a subgenre of pageantry in which the balance between realism and symbolism favored the latter, the differences in their social meanings were as significant for MacKaye as their aesthetic aims.²⁴² Whereas the primary function of a pageant is to reenact the past, the aim of a masque, MacKaye argues in his letter to the SLPDA, is to point to the future progress of civilization by means of allegory. The plan to produce both a pageant and a masque solved therefore, what he described as “a special problem in crowd psychology.”²⁴³ Because “a huge, half-socialized, modern multitude [is] unused by experience to imagining,” MacKaye reasons that the particular function of the *Masque* will be to “lead the attention of [the] large masses” from the quotidian images presented in the earlier pageant towards symbolic forms representing the ideal future social

²⁴¹ All quotations in this paragraph are from MacKaye’s proposal to the SLPDA, abridged in the Preface to MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, xi-xii. On Thomas Wood Stevens as a pageant-deviser see Glassberg, 164-67.

²⁴² Anne Throop Craig, “Pageantry,” *Encyclopedia Americana* (New York: Encyclopedia Americana Co., 1919):101. On Progressive Era masques see, Constance D’Arcy Mackay, “The Revival of the Masque” in *The Forest Princess, and other Masques* (New York: Henry Holt, 1916), 1-11.

²⁴³ This quotation and the two that follow are from Mac Kaye, *Saint Louis*, x-xi.

order.

The profusion of symbolic forms in the *Masque* was especially evident to one spectator who boasted, “We of St. Louis have just set before the world the greatest assemblage of symbolic images and acts . . . that any city on this earth ever has been privileged to present or witness.”²⁴⁴ The complexity—and modernity—of the *Masque*’s symbolic idiom can be seen in the design of its poster (figure 21). Unlike most pageant posters of the time (watercolors of serene, static landscapes) J.C. Leyendecker’s design emphasizes bold color and dynamic movement, and is dominated by a crowd of allegorical figures. Emblems including a sword, a star and an eagle vie for prominence with flags representing the French *fleur-de-lis*, the Spanish lion, the “Stars and Stripes” and the Jesuit cross. Each allegorical figure, including that of the Indian descending into the ocean, gazes in a slightly different direction though they are all, apparently, headed in the same direction. Figures, emblems, and flags compete and cooperate with another to create a dynamic portrait of an uncertain but hopeful community at a crucial moment of transition and redefinition. Though this community moves decidedly forward, it nevertheless seems uncertain about which signs to follow.

The overproduction of allegorical figures, flags and emblems in the poster for *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* suggests the difficulty of creating the kind of legible iconography Elias Canetti offers in his description of “national crowd symbols” in *Crowds and Power* (1960). For Canetti, national identity requires more than the recognition of one’s fellow citizens. “As soon as [a member of a nation] is named, or names himself,” Canetti proposes, “something more comprehensive moves into his consciousness, a larger unit to which he feels himself to be related.” This “larger unit” is neither geographical, nor linguistic, nor historical.

²⁴⁴ Arthur Elmore Bostwick, *A Librarian’s Open Shelf: Essays on Various Subjects* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1920), 188.

Rather, “the larger unit to which he feels himself related is always a *crowd* or a *crowd symbol*. Every member of a nation always sees himself, or his picture of himself, in a fixed relationship to the particular symbol which has become the most important for his nation. In its periodic reappearance when the moment demands it lies the continuity of national feeling.”²⁴⁵

Although in 1914 the United States was an emerging world power, it lagged behind Europe in the production of enduring national symbols through which it could exercise its renewed urge towards national feeling. Canetti’s examples—the German marching forest, the English sea-captain, the Swiss mountain, and the Spanish *matador*—had taken centuries to develop and were strongly rooted in folklore. Such symbols, Canetti explains, have the power to quickly mobilize the populace and rouse them to action in times of national need. By comparison, the emergent symbols of American national identity were all still relatively new and untested. Even the “Stars and Stripes,” had not yet accumulated the symbolic power it would begin to acquire after World War I.²⁴⁶ Even more importantly, the various symbols available for nomination as national crowd symbols were not seen as being strongly rooted in any kind of coherent, collective myth from which they could draw meaning. The flag and the eagle were well-known and often-reproduced images, but they told no story that Americans knew and recalled few, if any, heroic characters.

Given the persuasive arguments made by Philip Gleason and other historians that the American concept of nationhood was founded on abstract values of liberty and equality rather than on any particular linguistic, ethnic or religious heritage, MacKaye’s demand for symbols that would give these values concrete form appears both logical and pragmatic. Moreover, this

²⁴⁵ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, trans. Carol Stewart (New York: Macmillan, 1984), 170-71.

²⁴⁶ Prior to the institution of the Flag Code in 1923, the flag of the United States was not regularly displayed in official settings.

demand found support in the latest social scientific theories. Indeed, the work of American social psychologists gave a measure of scientific validity to MacKaye's idea of unifying the heterogeneous masses by means of creating a common language of symbols. Like many progressives and intellectuals, MacKaye was well acquainted with developments in the popular new field of social psychology and its language of mobs, crowds and publics. As such, his claim that the *Masque* solved a "special problem in crowd psychology" was hardly casual.

MacKaye's Civic Theatre Ideal: the Spectator-Crowd v. the Public

In 1911 sociologist George Elliot Howard lamented that "the psychology of the mob, the criminal, the newspaper . . . [and] the religious revival," had been virtually exhausted as objects of study. By asking, "[When] shall the spectator next take his turn?" Howard's essay, "Social Psychology of the Spectator," signaled a shift of focus away from the incendiary figures of the crowd that had so concerned late nineteenth-century European social theorists and toward a crowd figure defined by the rapid growth of new forms of popular entertainment: the urban leisure-seeker.²⁴⁷ For Howard, the "spectator-crowd" was more than a species of crowd found in theaters and movie-houses. It emblemized "the greatest social fact in modern civilization": the city. "Here in the city," he marveled, "is a mass of individuals capable of crowd characteristics "without presence." They display exaggerated suggestibility through mental contagion unaided by the bodily touch of the actual crowd. Now, a city is the mightiest of all spectacles, and as such it both reflects and molds the psychology of its people – its spectators."

For Howard, the city and its spectator-crowd are mutually constitutive. They produce one another through a tumultuous dialectic whereby the desires of the spectator-crowd shape the

²⁴⁷ All quotations in this paragraph and the following are from George Elliott Howard, "Social Psychology of the Spectator," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 18, No. 1 (July 1912): 37-41. Howard was the seventh President of the American Sociological Society and the author of numerous works on social history and sociology. See Arthur J. Todd, "George Elliott Howard, 1849-1928," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 34 (1929), 693-699.

character of the city, which then reproduces and multiplies these desires, projecting them back onto spectators with increasing abundance and rapidity. Therefore, as the pace of urbanization accelerates and as waves of immigration continue to create more spectators, there is a concomitant rise of crowd characteristics—irrationality, immorality, and mobility—in urban populations. Because the spectator-crowd is entirely shaped by habits of spectatorship rather than by tradition, it comes as little surprise that Howard lays the blame for its debased condition squarely on “the low standard of dramatic recreation in our country.” Moving from scientific argumentation to a call for reform he asks, “Since the suggestibility of the spectator-crowd has for ages been exploited for commercial ends, why not capitalize on its power for the advancement of social welfare?”

MacKaye’s answer to Howard’s call came one year later with the publication of *The Civic Theatre in Relation to the Redemption of Leisure*, a book which spoke to MacKaye’s lifelong ambition to reform the art of theater, one he had expressed as early as 1897 when, as a graduating Harvard senior, he delivered a commencement speech entitled “On the Need of Imagination in the Drama of To-day.” Encouraged by his mentor, the eminent theater scholar, George Pierce Baker, MacKaye travelled in Europe between 1897 and 1900, becoming familiar with theatrical movements developing there. In England he made the acquaintance of Edward Gordon Craig, who would become a lifelong friend, and while studying for a year in Leipzig, he learned about the work of the Belgian poet and playwright Maurice Maeterlinck whose writings for the stage he came to admire above all others. He returned to the United States an avowed symbolist, resolute in his view that theater should not simply mirror life, but should instead strive to expand the imaginations of spectators whose daily lives made little room for thinking or for dreaming.

MacKaye began writing verse plays on ancient and medieval themes. Among them were *The Canterbury Pilgrims* (1903), *Jeanne d'Arc* (1906), and *Sappho and Phaon* (1907). Unlike the drawing-room comedies written by Louis Napoleon Parker, MacKaye's symbolist dramas were not box-office successes. They were considered by most to be too abstract and wordy to hold the attention of general audiences. Nevertheless, they gained the admiration of influential theater scholars and critics who, like MacKaye, were at the time calling for more imagination and less stultifying realism on the American stage. Despite his continuing lack of popular success, MacKaye came to be considered one of the important playwrights of his day. He was regularly referred to in the same breath as Eugene O'Neill and, though their theatrical visions could hardly have been farther apart, he and O'Neill were named as the two major figures in American drama by Thomas Dickinson in 1925.²⁴⁸ The two men never met, though they exchanged several cordial letters, and both seem to have been wise enough not to comment on one another's plays.

When pageants began to appear in the United States, MacKaye was experimenting with writing, directing and performing symbolist masques within the small community of writers and artists who lived, along with MacKaye and his family, at the MacDowell Colony in Cornish, New Hampshire. However, two events of 1908 seem to have turned his attention to the possibility of making similar experiments on a much grander scale. First, MacKaye visited Berkeley, California to attend the annual Bohemian Club grove masques. Next, he travelled to England to see the *Bath Pageant* devised by Frank Lascelles, and perhaps also the *Dover Pageant* devised by Louis Napoleon Parker. Almost immediately he set to work on his first pageant, the *Gloucester Pageant*, which was performed in 1909 by a cast of more than one

²⁴⁸ See Thomas H. Dickinson, *Playwrights of the New American Theater* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967): 55-60; 126.

thousand. One year later he devised a pair of pageants for the city of Pittsburgh, to be performed in consecutive years, but the massive endeavor failed when a bribery scandal involving nearly every city official became public.

Despite his disappointment, MacKaye persevered in his efforts to develop his symbolist vision of mass pageantry. In 1913 he assisted his sister, Hazel, in her production of the *National Woman's Suffrage Pageant*, he advised his good friends John Reed and Robert Edmond Jones in their production of *The Paterson Strike Pageant* and he collected materials on W.E.B. Du Bois' pageant, the *Star of Ethiopia*. *The Civic Theatre* was published that same year, bringing MacKaye's ideas about transforming the American theater to the attention of a much wider audience than any he had yet commanded in a playhouse.

MacKaye's determination to transform the American theater through the sheer force of his personal artistic vision, as described in detail in *The Civic Theatre*, was a characteristic that he likely inherited from his famous father. As a well-known actor-manager and playwright, Steele MacKaye had tested the limits of theatrical practice by technologizing the theatrical space, subjecting theatrical time to greater standards of efficiency, and inventing machines designed to delight his patrician audiences with realistic spectacular effects. Requiring ever larger audiences to match the grandiosity of his theatrical plans, the senior MacKaye was, both in his own day and after his death, best known as the designer of the Spectatorium, a twenty-stage, 10,000 seat theater planned (but never completed) for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.²⁴⁹

In many ways MacKaye's "Civic Theatre ideal" was even grander than the Spectatorium; he aimed to enlarge theater audiences and to reimagine theatrical space by entirely reforming the role of theater in American culture. In *The Civic Theatre* MacKaye argues for the development

²⁴⁹ See Joseph Anton Sokalski, *Pictorial Illusionism: the Theatre of Steele MacKaye* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2007).

of a national program of people's theater projects requiring mass popular participation, the financial backing of government endowments (rather than private sector funding), and the creation of a national Civic Theatre Bureau to oversee all Civic Theatre projects. The Civic Theatre, complete with its own carefully designed emblem, was designed to become an important social institution by becoming a permanent political institution. MacKaye's book spoke to the hope that in return for providing Americans with a civic and moral education, the government would protect and sustain the emerging American theater.

To convince readers of the need for the Civic Theatre, MacKaye explains its influence on social relations; he expects participation in its programs to have a positive effect on everything from "the mating of men and women," and "Home Economics" to industrial relations. Concerning "those captains of industry who may be seeking a more enlightened cooperation with labor," MacKaye argues that the Civic Theatre will be "sure to draw eager support from such audiences and would undoubtedly conduce to an *esprit de corps* and a more vital efficiency of the workers."²⁵⁰ Like Howard's essay, MacKaye's book drew heavily on Jane Addams' *Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* and Michael D. Davis' *Exploitation of Pleasure* to present a picture of urban leisure-seekers corrupted by the influence of "consciousness-gashing" motion-pictures, "demoralizing" burlesque shows, and "brain-enfeebling vaudeville."²⁵¹ "The use of a nation's leisure is the test of its civilization," MacKaye declares.²⁵² "How then," he asks, "does [this gigantic producer America] organize his night leisure? Into what hands of public trust does he commit this most precious engine of national influence? Ignored by the indifference of public

²⁵⁰ MacKaye, *Civic Theatre*, 60; 69; 45.

²⁵¹ Howard, 40; 41; 48.

²⁵² Percy MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre*, 30.

spirit, [it] has been left to be organized by private speculation—the amusement business.”²⁵³

Like Howard, he seeks, paradoxically, to make use of the suggestibility of working class men and women in order to develop their capacity for rational behavior. If, according to Howard, the city is the mightiest of all spectacles and its corresponding mode of aesthetic production is realism, then, MacKaye claims, only the symbolist theater’s refusal to reproduce reality, its utopian insistence on transformation, and its emphasis on universality will be powerful enough to redirect the gaze of spectators beyond their concrete surroundings, transporting them to a “nobler theatre” existing “not primarily for the boards” but “in the mind of man.”²⁵⁴ It is on that imaginary stage, MacKaye says, that human beings may play their proper roles and begin to envision a new social order.

MacKaye’s contemporaries generally regarded his book on the Civic Theatre as a utopian tract; on one hand, progressive reformers saw it as an impractical means of achieving social transformation, while on the other hand, aesthetic reformers (like Craig) saw it as an illegitimate compromise with public taste. However, Richard Cándida Smith’s recent work on the emergence of symbolism confirms that MacKaye’s ideas were wholly consistent with the claim advanced by early French symbolists that, “to achieve clarity about social realities, the “people” needed more than a rehashing of injustices they already knew only too well from daily life.”²⁵⁵ For European symbolists living in the aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune, dismantling the barriers to social transformation required more than another political revolution; it required “substituting aesthetics for politics, and imagining social relationships as if they were elements in a

²⁵³ MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre*, 30-31.

²⁵⁴ MacKaye, “On the Need of Imagination in the Drama of To-day,” *Harvard Advocate*, vol. 63, no. 10 (30 Jun 1897), 140.

²⁵⁵ Richard Cándida Smith, *Mallarmé’s Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), xv-xvi.

composition organized by an intelligence striving to conform to natural processes” of social evolution, which had been stunted by the effects of mass culture and industrial labor.

For MacKaye, the transformation the spectator-crowd entails a reassessment of the purposes of theatrical forms of expression. The result is a barely reconcilable split between *drama* and *theater* that he reiterates in *The Civic Theatre* and many other works. That which aims to copy human behavior, MacKaye calls *drama*, while that which aims to “counteract rather than copy the defects in the civilization of the day,” MacKaye calls *theater*.²⁵⁶ The former focuses on the development of the art form, while the latter emphasizes the development of the public. Nearly all contemporary plays fall outside MacKaye’s definition of theater. Nevertheless, he is willing to grant that a basic kind of mimetic urge and its accompanying cathartic effects may be tolerated, if they are wisely controlled. He reasons that “The function of the theatre is essentially a civic and moral function. The function of the drama is essentially an aesthetic and unmoral function. It is rightly the function of drama as an art to reflect the state of the world about it by holding its “magic mirror up to nature [. . .] but the theater as an institution should guide the drama’s reflection by a definite ethical policy calculated steadily to improve the impressionable souls of men who gaze in the mirror.”

The trope of the “responsible guardian” and his passionate but immature ward plays out repeatedly in MacKaye’s account of the relationship of theater to drama, of symbolism to realism and, as we shall see, in his articulation of the relationship of masque to pageant. When it appears again in his description of the Civic Theatre as “the harmonious mind of a man whose passions and imaginations are controlled and directed by his enlightened reason to the service of his race,” it nearly doubles as a description of the figure of the Public that the social psychologist E.A. Ross had envisioned as a custodian for the crowd in 1901.

²⁵⁶ This quotation and the three that follow are from *The Civic Theatre*, 135-136.

In *Social Control: a Survey of the Foundations of Order*, Ross describes the crowd as the “most aimless, arbitrary, and capricious” of social formations, representing “the common man in his most unreasonable mood.”²⁵⁷ The key to efficient and effective social control, he argues, is the development of the Public. Because “the Public is the people organized about natural centres of influence . . . [its] control is therefore less emotional and therefore better fitted to protect the common interests.”²⁵⁸ Moreover, if carefully directed by “the leadership of the wise,” the gradual development of the Public will result in “the improvement of the general character and intelligence of the people.”²⁵⁹ As a potent form of crowd control, Ross’ Public is a prophylactic form of collectivity that contains the excesses of “the people,” thereby improving their minds and manners, and making them fit citizens of a participatory democracy.

Implicit in Ross’ distinction between crowd and public are a host of other binaries—immigrant and native, female and male, non-white and white, working class and ruling class—that had been deeply embedded in the foundations of crowd theory since its inception.²⁶⁰ Rather than undoing these binaries, pageant-devisers and progressives like MacKaye sought, at best, to raise the status of non-whites, women, immigrants and workers by offering them the opportunity to participate in civic rituals. Such participation, according to the St. Louis officials responsible

²⁵⁷ Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1901), 72. Highly influential as both a writer and lecturer during his lifetime, Ross wrote twenty-seven books and over 300 articles on social psychology, history and reform. See R. Jackson Wilson, *In Quest of Community: Social Philosophy in the United States, 1860-1920* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968), 87-113.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 72-73.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 368. A more extensive discussion of the differences between the Crowd and the Public can be found in Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Psychology, an Outline and Sourcebook* (Macmillan, New York, 1911), 63-84. Also see Daria Frezza, *The Leader in the Crowd: Democracy in American Public Discourse, 1880-1941*, trans. Martha King (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

²⁶⁰ On the race, gender, and class prejudices underlying the work of early crowd theorists see Robert A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London: Sage, 1975) and Graham Richards, *Race, Racism, and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

for organizing the *Pageant and Masque*, was promoted as being analogous to participation in the electoral democratic process.

Playing Indian: Ritual Publics, Savage Crowds and the Artist of the Future

Though he claimed that “under the sun and stars, as nowhere else, dramatic art becomes convincing to the people,” MacKaye may as well have said that in the open air, as nowhere else, *the people* become convincing to the people.²⁶¹ Much as the creators of the French revolutionary festivals associated open air spaces with liberation, equality and “the unimpeded extension of happiness,” American pageant-devisers believed, like Thomas Dickinson, that “by its nature,” the open air-theater represented “a spontaneous social demand.”²⁶² For a city to possess a natural amphitheater was a sign of its democratic potential, enabling participants and spectators to envision themselves as a naturally and spontaneously occurring “public.” Unsurprisingly then, pageant organizers were overcome with joy when MacKaye declared, on his first visit to the city, that the size and conditions of the Art Hill amphitheater in Forest Park were unmatched by any he had seen. SLPDA member George Kessler proudly attested to the space’s egalitarian value and its ability to encourage rational movement: “the gentle rise of the ground is just sufficient to make each row of seats exactly the right height above the row in front. Thanks to Mother Nature, there need be no craning of necks to see every movement that is being made upon the stage.”²⁶³

If the symbolic function of the amphitheater was to project an image of the public as natural, the work involved in building the massive pageant stage and its technologically

²⁶¹ MacKaye, *Civic Theatre*, 51.

²⁶² Quoted in Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 127; Dickinson, 123. The “open-air” theater movement in the United States, of which pageantry was a part, was spearheaded by Sheldon Cheney, a student of George Pierce Baker at Harvard, founder of *Theatre Arts* magazine, and author of numerous books on the contemporary state of the American theater.

²⁶³ Quotations in this and the following paragraph are from George Kessler, “A World Site is Location of Great Stage for the Pageant and Masque,” *Bulletin of the Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*, vol. 2 (PMK Papers), 4.

integrated environment was linked to themes of modernity and industrialization. Newspapers repeatedly associated the construction of the stage with the “upbuilding” of the city. Pageant organizers boasted that St. Louis was not only getting ready to host a grand public celebration, but also “to set a precedent in stagecraft.” Kessler boasted, “No such stage was ever before conceived. The ancient Greeks, who made of the out-of-door drama one of their finest arts, undoubtedly would gape in a highly un-classical way at the impressive manner of the stage.”²⁶⁴

Larger than both the New York Hippodrome and the Metropolitan Opera House, the pageant stage occupied two acres of Forest Park. It was built to accommodate 2,000 actors at a time, dozens of horses, and a hidden orchestra comprising eight hundred voices and three hundred musicians (figure 22). The lagoon at the foot of the hill was reshaped in order to create a “mini-Mississippi” and a tent city behind the stage accommodated dozens of tents and stations as well as additional rehearsal stages and construction areas.²⁶⁵ Telephone systems concealed within forty foot high towers coordinated communication between more than 4,000 offstage workers and onstage performers while lighting stations controlled more than 1,000 lights embedded at the foot of the lagoon and hanging from the tops of the towers and the roof of the Art Museum. The new magazine, *Electrical World*, applauded the nighttime *Masque* as one of “the most astonishing electrical events” of the year.²⁶⁶ Remarking on the efforts of the thousands of men and women from different communities who built stage machinery, properties, and costumes, the

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ My description of the construction of the stage and pageant grounds come from the following sources: Untitled article in the *St. Louis Republic* (19 Jan 1914, PMK Papers); *Bulletin of the Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis*, no. 2 (PMK Papers); “The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis: What it is and Why it is produced,” (PMK Papers); “Electric Decorative Lighting,” *Electrical World*, undated (1914, PMK Papers) and Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*.

²⁶⁶ *Electrical World* (PMK Papers). Among the lighting effects described by *Electrical World* were a 1000-watt nitrogen lamp “altar” on the center mound and a structure “rising 75 feet above the stage arranged to show a field of small stars, with the constellation of the Great Bear showing in large stars.”

Secretary to the Executive Committee of the SLPDA, Luther Ely Smith, hailed the construction of the pageant as “an example of the wonders that may be accomplished by a united city.” It gave evidence of “the [same] civic spirit which will build our bridge, pass our charter, [and] stretch a plaza from 12th Street to Grand Avenue.”²⁶⁷

Although the SLPDA claimed the pageant would break down divisions between immigrant groups, the casting process—begun six months prior to performance—served both to expand and further codify racial and ethnic categories. Immigrants of English, German and Irish descent were welcomed into the new version of the public that city officials hoped to mobilize in service of passing the new reforms, while other groups with little or no power as voting blocks were either marginalized or completely excluded. The annual civic event with which most St. Louisans were familiar, and which had been a city tradition since 1878, was the Veiled Prophets Parade in which members of St. Louis’ Old French Families dressed up as historical figures in order to represent their ancestors. In keeping with the democratic intent of the event, the SLPDA extended the privilege of performing the role of the city’s first families beyond the city’s elite; it invited English, German, and Irish American associations to perform in pageant scenes representing the founding of the St. Louis. However, Serbian, Croatian, Greek, Italian, Polish, and Hungarian American associations were all assigned roles in scenes depicting the arrival of “new” immigrants, despite protests from these communities that many of their members had been living in St. Louis since the city’s founding.

To further emphasize the symbolic assimilation of certain ethnic groups into the new version of the city’s public and the exclusion of other ethnic groups, English, German and Irish American associations were given no special designation in the pageant program, while the

²⁶⁷ Luther Ely Smith, “Pageant to Make City Better Place to Live In,” *Bulletin of the Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis*, No. 2 (PMK Papers), 7.

members of all other associations were listed by their ethnicity. That certain groups appeared as “St. Louisans,” while others appeared as “immigrants” meant that, although the casting of the pageant signaled an unambiguous shift in the city’s sociopolitical topography, this change was far less radical than either the SLPDA or MacKaye claimed. As if to further clarify the fact that participation in the pageant conferred the right to inhabit “public” space, the SLPDA entirely denied participation to other residents of St. Louis. Although more Black Americans lived in the city than any “new” immigrant group, only one Black resident appeared in the pageant—in the role of “Africa.”²⁶⁸ Although a Chippewa group from Minnesota offered, for a small fee, to perform in an exhibition baseball game, the SLPDA denied the proposal. In fact, to my knowledge, no Native American communities or individuals were invited to participate in the *Pageant and Masque*. As such, the figurative distance of Black and Native Americans from the public was re-performed, and so re-inscribed, in a series of exclusionary acts existing on the invisible margins of the yet-to-be-performed pageant.

David Glassberg interprets the refusal of the Chippewas’ offer to participate as one of many acts of exclusion from the pageant’s history, equivalent, for example, to the exclusion of Black St. Louisans.²⁶⁹ It was, indeed, that. However, the number and variety of Native American communities represented in the *Pageant and Masque* (Mississippians, Osage, Missouri and more), by contrast with the near total invisibility of Black communities, invites us to investigate more closely to what ends the “Indian,” as an allegorical figure of collectivity, is deployed in the *Masque*. For the majority of the *Masque*’s performers, participation, in fact, meant covering their bodies and faces with copper greasepaint and “playing Indian,” a concept Philip Deloria has used to describe performances of “nativeness” by non-native peoples—from the Boston Tea Party to

²⁶⁸ My description of the casting process is based on Glassberg, 178-181, and upon documents in the PMK Papers.

²⁶⁹ Glassberg, 178.

the Boy Scouts—that have served to negotiate contradictory models of American national identity.

Like public celebrations of earlier centuries, the new pageants depended on the figure of the Indian as both a savage other against which American civilization could define itself and as a peaceful native whose claims to an authentic aboriginality were deserving of both admiration and imitation.²⁷⁰ In the *Masque*, the symbolic value of the Indian is so great that the visibility of actual Indians such as the Chippewa would have served only as an uncomfortable reminder of the real devastation wrought by the arrival of European colonizers. In order to retain the Indian as a symbol, Native Americans are portrayed in the *Pageant and Masque* as already vanished peoples. The violence of colonization is entirely erased from the spectacle and, in its stead, the burden of blame for the demise of the “Red Race” is shouldered by “natural” processes of environmental disaster and racial degeneration.²⁷¹

Although few would dispute the argument that the new pageants exhibited overt racism in their creation of Native American stereotypes, a closer look at how St. Louisans “played Indian” in the *Masque* suggests that the figure of the Indian referred less to actual, absent Native Americans than to the urban masses—those who MacKaye’s Civic Theater ideal proposes to civilize and enlighten. That is to say, “playing Indian” became a way, in MacKaye’s words, to “interpret the people to themselves.”²⁷² That pageants often linked the figure of the Indian to that of the urban worker can be seen in numerous images in which worker and Indian mirror each other in costume and in gestures of submission (figure 23) or in cartoons like one from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (figure 24), set atop an Indian mound “built by Moundbuilders Local no.

²⁷⁰ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 5.

²⁷¹ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, xiii.

²⁷² MacKaye, quoted in Kilmer, 319.

6,” in which *Masque* participants discuss “working class” themes—baseball, lumbago, and the need for tobacco—while going through the motions of “Indian” work and ritual. Yet the uses of the Indian are even more complex in the *Masque* than in such standard pageant images because, as I will demonstrate, it employed two opposing modes of “playing Indian”—the ritual and the savage—in order to stage the differences between barbarian crowds and civilized publics, and yet a third mode, the prophetic, in order to establish the “artist of the future” as the only figure capable of inspiring the transformation of the former into the latter.

The Prelude to the *Masque* depicts an invented lamentation ritual of the Mississippian or “Moundbuilding” peoples, the eleventh-century inhabitants of the middle Mississippi river valley primarily known for their creation of colossal earthwork mounds. In MacKaye’s mass pantomime, actors playing Moundbuilders perform ceremonial dances, acrobatic feats, and prayers in honor of a deceased leader. Through the ritual mode of “playing Indian,” the *Masque* creates its first and most unambiguously utopian image of the public: one in which citizens achieve physical excellence through ritual dances that imitate the geometrical forms of their city’s sacred architecture.

Although few St. Louisans were familiar with the ruins of Mississippian architecture, MacKaye was so enchanted by his visit to the “Mounds” in nearby Cahokia, Illinois that he decided to recreate them in St. Louis’ Forest Park. During the eleventh century, the densely populated urban center of Mississippian culture, called Cahokia, was composed of a vast central plaza, surrounded by mounds of differing geometrical shapes which may have corresponded to different civic functions.²⁷³ Monk’s Mound, the largest of these, which could be seen from different parts of the city, was most likely a kind of temple where the high priest of the city

²⁷³ See Sally A. Kitt Chapel, *Cahokia: Mirror of the Cosmos* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 142-145.

resided.

The plan of this ancient city, with its monumental buildings, vast causeways and interconnected plazas, expressed the hopes of St. Louis activists who firmly believed that a more organized city would help unite a heterogeneous urban populace. MacKaye's chief goal, however, was to imbue his *Masque* with what he regarded as classical values of form and beauty, as well a sense of sacred order. He argued that the reconstructed Mounds would steal the attention of St. Louisans away from the fragmented and diversionary spaces of the city—those inferior “monuments of a machine-made age”—thereby encouraging the development of more rational, noble and beautiful forms of social organization.²⁷⁴

Despite the depiction of the Moundbuilders' ritual in the *Globe-Democrat* cartoon, the participants in the Prelude were not middle-aged men, but Boy Scouts and girls from local athletics clubs. George Pierce Baker described the choreography of the scene: “Slowly and exquisitely, figures walking, swaying, dancing, filled the great stage, coming one hardly knew from where. And as it filled from the right in Indian file, with right arm extended before them and right knee raised high like figures in Assyrian *bas-reliefs*, came the Boy Scouts, clad only in breech-clouts, their bodies stained a yellow-brown.”²⁷⁵ The natural historian and activist, Ernest Harold Baynes, added: “They represent the race at the very height of its civilization—a people beautiful of form and dress, lithe and graceful of movement, rejoicing in the strength and skill of their bodies which have been brought to a wonderful state of perfection. In seemingly never-ending graceful lines they wind across the plain, the men mostly nude, the women in soft-tinted, softly textured garments which give free play to the graceful bodies underneath.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ MacKaye, *Civic Theatre*, 63.

²⁷⁵ Baker, 391.

In this scene, the athletic bodies of young men and women provide the model material from which great civilizations may be built; conversely, their callisthenic performances give evidence that bodies can be “brought to perfection” through the performance of civic rituals such as the *Pageant and Masque*. Baker’s explicit reference to the participation of the Boy Scouts, along with Baynes’ attention to the topographical details of the performers’ bodies, evoke the physical culture movement’s efforts to improve social health by improving the physical health of individuals. Moreover, Baynes’ use of the word “movement” in this passage, and his subsequent refusal to use the word “dance” throughout his review, is particularly telling since many progressive reformers, particularly those involved in the physical culture movement, commonly distinguished *movement* from the *mobility* of crowds in the streets, the harmful *motions* of factory work, and even against *dance*, which one of MacKaye’s colleagues dismissively defined as no more than a matter of “teas and toes.”²⁷⁷ “Movement” became a special term connoting that which could only emerge from collective participation—from an organized effort to give shape to the social body.

For the American Pageant Association and its supporters, however, not just any kind of collective movement was deemed capable of transforming crowds into publics. Civic events such as festivals and parades allow for the creative self-expression of the masses (and this was certainly one of the movement’s primary aims), but fail to “coordinate individuals efficiently into the mass.”²⁷⁸ In order for a Public to take shape, citizens must rehearse and perform rituals requiring precision, repetition, and rhythm. As designed by the *Masque*’s director and

²⁷⁶ Ernest Harold Baynes, “The Biggest Show Ever Staged,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, undated (PMK Papers).

²⁷⁷ Mary Austin, quoted in “Mary Austin Mixes Religion, War and Drama,” *New York Tribune* (7 Nov 1915), C1.

²⁷⁸ Mary Porter Beegle and Jack Randall Crawford, *Community Drama and Pageantry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 193-196; Dickinson, 61.

scenographer, Joseph Lindon Smith, the choreography of the Moundbuilders' ritual, is organized, rational, precise, and efficient.²⁷⁹ Moreover, it appears to move forward without the urging or guidance of a leader. In fact, its movement seems to be predetermined by the repeating geometrical motifs of the ritual setting. A series of photographs, taken both during rehearsal and in performance, demonstrate how insistently Smith's choreography repeated the shapes of the cubiform altar, the circular shrine and the pyramidal mounds (figures 25, 26 and 27).²⁸⁰ Although both male and female Moundbuilders enter in winding lines imitating the shape of the river that passed between the stage and the audience, soon the men begin to dance in a rectangular pattern around the center altar while the women and girls dance towards them, ultimately forming circles on stage left and right. The older priests arrange themselves symmetrically at the edges of the largest central mound, creating a triangle. Young boys imitate their elders by making human pyramids on top of the two smaller mounds at stage left and stage right. Smith's choreography suggests that the Moundbuilders are a people who have so thoroughly incorporated the architectural shapes surrounding them, that they do not require a leader to guide their movements. They are an autonomous public whose rational and efficient use of their bodies corresponds to the design of their city.

If the Prelude envisions a society so determined by the uplifting influence of its monuments that it does not require leaders, it is also one in which architecture symbolically regulates social divisions as well as access to the sacred power generated by communal ritual. When the boys dance in squares while the girls dance in circles, the geometrical patterns they follow do more than insist that they move with precision; they serve to contain any libidinal

²⁷⁹ Joseph Lindon Smith was a painter known primarily for the skill with which he recreated ancient artifacts discovered on archaeological expeditions in Egypt.

²⁸⁰ My description of the Prelude is based on more than fifty rehearsal photographs from the PMK Papers, as well as dozens of contemporary newspaper accounts from MacKaye's scrapbook on the *Masque*, also in the PMK Papers.

energy that might emerge from an otherwise dangerous union of the sexes. Given MacKaye's belief that the promiscuous behavior of young people was one of the most insidious evils of the day and his consequent belief in the "value of the civic theatre idea to modern eugenic needs," it is perhaps not surprising to find that ritual dancing in the *Masque* serves to enforce the separation of the sexes rather than bringing them together in joyful expressions of civic unity.²⁸¹

Whereas the young women, divided into two non-interacting groups, never approach the altar, which marked the sacred center of both the stage space and the entire field of performance, the young men and boys who surround the altar never approach the largest central mound. The triangle formed by the priests alongside the central mound points upward, like an arrow, to the most sacred spot on the stage, the shrine at its apex. Smith's choreographed ritual establishes an increasing concentration of sacred power as well as an increasing lack of access to it; the achievement of an ideal public, as imagined in the Prelude, in fact depends upon a hierarchical distribution of power made visible, permanent and monumental by the presence of the Mound.

As the Moundbuilders' ritual fades from the audience's view in the smoke of the altar fire, an enormous puppet called Cahokia (after the site that inspired the setting for the *Masque*), is revealed sitting on the center mound (figure 28). Waking from a long sleep, the tragic figure tells the audience that the preceding Prelude enacted his dreaming memory of the glorious city in which he was once a revered priest. Now, Cahokia laments, his people have vanished. MacKaye's stage directions indicate what has become of them: "*Below [Cahokia], mysterious, half-seen, at the foot of the mound—crouched on its sides and lurking in the dark background--brute-headed forms of the "Wild Nature Forces" move and mingle with glimmering limbs of*

²⁸¹ MacKaye, *The Civic Theatre*, 68.

savages.”²⁸²

Although they are not referred to as Indians in the *Masque*, the group of characters called “Wild Nature Forces” serve as an allegorical representation of all the “savage” Indian communities who followed the Moundbuilders. A brief glance at Stevens’ naturalistic *Pageant* helps make this clear for its opening scenes trace the de-evolution of the “Indian” from a supposedly single, distinct culture (that of the Moundbuilders) to a passel of nomadic hordes whose degenerate habits are easily repelled, then reeducated through the heroic efforts of the French, Spanish and American colonists who occupied the St. Louis area between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In Stevens’ *Pageant* the Osage and the Missouri are represented as homeless, cowardly thieves who survive by means of begging and stealing. Those St. Louisans who played Osage and Missouri in *Pageant* scenes were double-cast as Wild Nature Forces in the *Masque*.²⁸³

Interpreting the figure of the Indian in the *Masque* as a symbol of the urban masses makes apparent that the transition from “playing Moundbuilders” to “playing Wild Nature Forces” signifies a descent from civilization into barbarism—from “culture” into “nature”—that was resonant with contemporary fears about the corrupting influence of cities on migrants from rural areas as well as nations abroad. Like the denizens of a modern metropolis, which E.A. Ross describes as a scene of “mingling without fellowship and . . . contact without intercourse,” of “wolfish struggle, crimes, frauds, exploitations and parasitism,” the tribes of Cahokia have been lured away from their ancestral grounds.²⁸⁴ They have been led “backward – backward/ Deeper into primal darkness” where they are found “masking with brutes, and mating/ In lairs of the

²⁸² All quotations pertaining to the scenes of the “Wild Nature Forces” are from MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 5-8; 20-22.

²⁸³ *Program of the Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* (PMK Papers).

²⁸⁴ Ross, *Social Control*, 19.

jungle.” No longer heeding Cahokia’s prayers, the Wild Nature Forces are ruled by “gods of Chaos” who urge them to give into their basest, animal instincts towards lust, greed and violence.

In all their aspects, the Wild Nature Forces illustrate the savagery of the modern crowd. Their movement consists of lurking, crouching, crawling, mingling, mating, leaping, rushing and, unsurprisingly, crowding. Unlike the Moundbuilders, the Wild Nature Forces are capable of exhibiting only groping, half-formed motions or rowdy, uncontrolled dancing. They move in multiple, arbitrary directions. They remain all on the same level, close to the ground where it is darkest. Their shapes, which are only ever described as “half-seen” or “half-hidden,” are entirely indistinguishable from one another. By contrast with Cahokia’s erudite English (discussed below), the distinctively vocalic language invented by MacKaye for the Wild Nature Forces (“Soomóohan Noohái! Póoloo-poolóo-nool Hilóha!”) was punctuated by “wolf-barks, whinnying noises, the war-yells of savages” and occasional indistinct murmuring. For the *Masque’s* spectators, perhaps the most obvious difference between the Moundbuilders and the Wild Nature Forces would have been one of costuming. Whereas those involved in the Moundbuilders scene wore highly designed costumes, those who played Wild Nature Forces scenes wore only sackcloth.

The Wild Nature Forces epitomize historian J.S. McClelland’s definition of the crowd; they are “what is to be ruled.”²⁸⁵ When the child Saint Louis makes his first appearance, Moses-like, via canoe, he is accompanied by an immense sword which, it is prophesied, he will one day wield against the encroaching “powers of chaos.” Despite Cahokia’s pleas for restraint, the Wild Nature Forces attack the child, trying to drag him away. Finally, the child attempts to lift the sword and, Arthur-like, does so, “staggering under its bulk.” At the sight of a four-year-old child lifting an enormous weapon over his head, The Wild Nature Forces are stunned into stasis and

²⁸⁵ McClelland, 1.

silence, “the beast faces . . . startled, glowering, murmurous.” Then, all at once, they “swarm down the mound sides, rush into the darkness and vanish.” Cahokia responds joyfully: “Wonder and awe, they have saved thee!” Saint Louis’s first victory in the *Masque* is one in which the mere appearance of a symbol has the power to bring the crowd to order and then to expel it effectively and efficiently.

By far the most photographed image from the *Masque*, the puppet Cahokia was also, for many, the most compelling actor in the production. MacKaye lovingly called Cahokia “my Über-marionette”; both Robert Edmond Jones and Thomas Dickinson regarded the *Masque* as the only theatrical work to successfully explore the possibilities of Edward Gordon Craig’s creature on the American stage.²⁸⁶ By 1914, the convention of beginning a pageant with an Indian messenger, chief or priest was already well-established; however, MacKaye’s decision to use a giant puppet in the role, rather than a live actor, was highly unusual.²⁸⁷ It spoke not only to the extent of Craig’s influence upon MacKaye’s artistic choices, but to MacKaye’s idea of the role of the artist in the construction of a new social order. Through Cahokia, MacKaye “plays Indian” in the prophetic mode, negotiating his relationship as artist and pageant-deviser to the inhabitants of Saint Louis.

Rather than dressing the puppet in the customary braids, beads and feathers of most pageant Indians, MacKaye and Smith stripped the original design of all its details, transforming Cahokia into a universal emblem of prophecy identifiable by his tattered robes, his overgrown

²⁸⁶ Robert Edmond Jones, “The Theatre of Tomorrow,” *New York Times* (29 Jan 1922), 40; Dickinson. 143. Edward Gordon Craig explains his theory of the Über-marionette in *On the Art of the Theatre* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 54-94.

²⁸⁷ Glassberg, 139.

hair and his blind, vacant eyes.²⁸⁸ Although MacKaye must certainly have intended Cahokia to represent what Craig describes as “the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization,” the puppet’s remarkable likeness to Craig (or at least to an abstract portrait of the character Craig would become late in life) suggests that Cahokia also represents the modern “Artist of the Theatre”: one of the “new race of poet dramatists” whose visions MacKaye claimed would possess the power to prophesy new civilizations.²⁸⁹

MacKaye’s profound reverence for Cahokia is unmistakable in the innumerable photographs that show him gazing up at the puppet and holding his hand (figure 29). Conversely, photographs showing MacKaye rehearsing with actors, frequently betray the posture of a stern disciplinarian (figure 30). The difference between the attitudes displayed in these photographs suggests that, for MacKaye, as for Craig, the human body is a far less suitable material for art than the Über-marionette. Unlike the “half-formed” people of St. Louis, who “must provide in themselves [the] creative material” for the poet-dramatist to manipulate, Cahokia’s puppet-body is already a work of art exemplifying MacKaye’s ideal civic body; his limbs, head and hands move in absolute harmony with each other and with the music of the hidden orchestra.²⁹⁰

MacKaye professed disagreement with Craig’s idea to banish from the theater all “the personal elements implied in the work of the actor” – a concept that would, as MacKaye must have realized, been utterly incompatible with his own “Civic Theatre” ideal.²⁹¹ However, his repeated descriptions of *Masque* participants as materials to be harmonized through performance suggest that MacKaye took for granted that as a dramatist he was responsible for transforming the

²⁸⁸ The original design for Cahokia was drawn by a local St. Louis woman who won a design competition sponsored by the SLPDA.

²⁸⁹ Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre*, 39; MacKaye, quoted in Kilmer, 319.

²⁹⁰ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, x.

²⁹¹ MacKaye, *Civic Theatre* (fn.), 27.

individual bodies of St. Louisans as well as the civic body of St. Louis as a whole, into works of art that might move with as much grace and precision as a puppet.

If the Über-marionette's body illustrates one aspect of MacKaye's understanding of the cultural work of the pageant-deviser—that of a mass puppeteer—Cahokia's speech articulates a corollary role, that of a mass ventriloquist. Although the Moundbuilders, like Cahokia, embody physical perfection, they do not speak. As for the Wild Nature Forces, they speak only in an incomprehensible stage-Indian invented by MacKaye. Consequently it is left to Cahokia to speak for “the Red Race” and he does so not only in English but predominantly in an iambic pentameter that thundered across the vast spaces of Forest Park via a megaphone located within his cavernous chest.²⁹² Cahokia's verse monologues—“inherited” by the Knight Saint Louis in the second act of the *Masque*—were not only regarded as an essential element of the best pageants of the day, but were an important component in MacKaye's conception of himself as a “poet-dramatist” of the people.

In a lengthy interview with the poet Joyce Kilmer, MacKaye asserted that “The masque is spoken through many mouths, but it might be spoken or chanted by the bard himself.”²⁹³ Obscuring the differences between an individual poet's recitation and a mass of performers speaking verse in unison, MacKaye suggests to Kilmer that his gift for writing English verse obliges him to speak for the people since they are, as yet, “a form still but half-articulate.”²⁹⁴

Through the mask of Cahokia, MacKaye communicates his vision of the fall of social civilization in oracular tones:

Ten thousand moons, I reigned. Ten thousand moons

²⁹² Baker, 392.

²⁹³ Kilmer, 310.

²⁹⁴ MacKaye, *Civic Theatre*, 83.

My vanished people piled these mounds . . .
 And here I blessed their rites with social arts
 And solemn festivals,
 . . .
 . . . Ai-ya, my people!
 Where are the tribes of Cahokia?
 Lo, where the trails of twilight
 Hide them, naked and scattered,
 Luring them backward – backward
 Deeper in primal darkness,
 Masking with brutes, and mating
 In lairs of the jungle. Lo, now,
 They have forgotten their lordly
 Arts and the songs of my altar –
 . . . Yea, now,
 They have forgotten Cahokia,
 Me – me, their father! ²⁹⁵

Although in these lines Cahokia bewails the de-evolution of his people, the Moundbuilders, into the beast-like Wild Nature Forces, we can also hear in them MacKaye's voice lamenting the promiscuity and backwardness of the urban masses, while encouraging the rebirth of a civilization founded on "rites," "social arts" and "solemn festivals." Notably, Cahokia cries that when the people forget "their lordly arts," they also forget "their father." With these lines, MacKaye directly refers to himself and his fellow artists. Much as he insisted that his Civic Theatre ideal could not be achieved without the leadership of an elite corps of professionally trained artists, MacKaye was unable to imagine a civilization worthy of the name that did not include highly educated and articulate artists as revered priests of the people.²⁹⁶

Though he remained steadfast in his belief that his was a voice that could speak to and for the people, others were highly skeptical. In an address to the National Speech Association concerning the value of pageantry in improving the English-speaking ability of Americans, pageant- deviser Ellis Oberholtzer argued that the poetry of MacKaye's *Masque* was wasted

²⁹⁵ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 7-8.

²⁹⁶ MacKaye, *Civic Theatre*, 108-112.

because its heightened language could not be understood by the masses.²⁹⁷ Even more telling is the previously-mentioned cartoon from the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in which *Masque* participants dressed as Indians converse in an exaggerated vernacular. Speaking from inside a box that graphically isolates him from the *Masque*'s participants, MacKaye's British-inflected, erudite dialect seems as foreign as that which he invents for his stage Indians. As Coppelia Kahn has argued, MacKaye and other pageant-devisers were members of a "genteel elite that tended to identify its Anglo-Protestant heritage with that of the nation's."²⁹⁸ Like the members of the National Speech Association, they saw the English-speaking tradition as an indispensable civilizing influence upon both the "old" and "new" immigrant populations of American cities.

MacKaye's interview with Kilmer and his conception of Cahokia reveals that, as a poet, he recognizes an obligation to speak to and for the masses, not to aid them in making their own voices heard. Further, as a symbolist poet, MacKaye sees it as his urgent task to imagine and represent dreamworlds that may, in time, become realities. Though Cahokia cannot overcome the "powers of chaos," he can defy them by means of his prophetic powers: "For still I dream – and wait/ And watchful dreaming overcomes the world."²⁹⁹ As Cahokia speaks these lines, his dream takes the material form of the child Saint Louis, who will "inherit [Cahokia's] battles" and lead a new people to "fight with the formless void for beauty and order to triumph":

Rejoice, O heart of pain! Be glad!
My dream is a strong child. . .
. . . and shall go forth
Amid the strength of men, to vanquish there
The dreamless multitudes, and smite

²⁹⁷ Ellis Oberholtzer, quoted in *Proceedings of the National Speech Arts Association* (Toledo: The Association: 1913-1916), 39. As an historian and pageant-deviser, Oberholtzer was an influential figure in the pageantry movement.

²⁹⁸ Coppelia Kahn, "Caliban at the Stadium: Shakespeare and the Making of Americans," *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 2000), 263.

²⁹⁹ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 9-10.

The blind with vision. – Sing, O heart of peace!
My dream is a strong child, and shall restore me!³⁰⁰

The poet Sara Teasdale included these lines in a published tribute in honor of MacKaye's fiftieth birthday; she was but one of many American artists who would come to associate Cahokia with MacKaye's dream that the Civic Theater ideal would materialize and outlast him.³⁰¹

While Cahokia cradles the child Saint Louis in his arms, a boat arrives carrying an enormous glowing sphere atop which sit three masked figures representing French, Spanish and Jesuit colonists. When the trio performs a baptismal ceremony in which the child is given his name, it is the first time the words "Saint Louis" are spoken in the *Masque*.³⁰² The moment signals a major reversal in the action of the drama as the *Masque* turns from mourning the irretrievable past to the task of constructing the future. In a moment that George Pierce Baker compared to Max Reinhardt's staging of *Sumurun* in New York two years earlier, the transition between the acts of the *Masque* was accomplished by an Interlude in which allegorical figures called "The Years" moved slowly like characters in a frieze across the ramparts on the back wall of the stage.³⁰³

Whereas the figure of the Indian dominates the first act, the second act puts forth a similarly complex figure for the urban masses: the Pioneer. Like the Indian, the Pioneer was a familiar figure from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century public celebrations. In particular, scenes of pioneers marching with the tools of their various trades (scythes, picks, shovels) or symbolically clearing the land in front of them with axes had been a staple of American civic

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 20.

³⁰¹ Sara Teasdale, quoted in *Percy MacKaye: a Symposium on his Fiftieth Birthday* (Hanover: Dartmouth University Press, 1925), 49.

³⁰² MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 30.

³⁰³ Baker, 398.

parades since well before the Revolutionary era. Participants in such performances embodied the nation's pursuit of "manifest destiny" and the conquest of the frontier.³⁰⁴ In the *Masque of St. Louis*, however, the familiar figure is adapted to reflect twentieth-century concerns. In the *Masque's* first act, the figure of the Indian signifies preindustrial and proto-national forms of an ideal Public; as such, it deals with more abstract problems concerning the evolution and decline of civilizations. The Pioneer, by contrast, is a figure firmly located within American history; that is to say, within the temporal and geographical boundaries defining the national imaginary. The second act, therefore, focuses on defining a specifically American emerging Public, and the Pioneer serves as a figure through which to examine intersecting problems of participatory democracy and citizenship in an age of mass immigration.

Playing Pioneer: Performing Consensus & Ritualizing Whiteness

The first of the *Masque's* several Pioneer groups enter into a space from which the ritual center has been removed. The sacred altar fire of the Moundbuilders has been extinguished. The only remaining light on stage emanates from the small shrine at the apex of the center mound: an enclosed, distant space to which, for the remainder of the *Masque*, no one but Saint Louis himself will have access. Into this much altered environment, Pioneers marching in "thronging groups" enter with spades, scythes, axes and rifles.³⁰⁵ The first indication, however, that these Pioneers will represent the modern urban masses, and in particular the "new" immigrant masses, is that, unlike Pioneers of pageant past, these are lost and leaderless crowds of men, desperately in search of a place to "make camp." Though they carry the tools of their forebears, they do not

³⁰⁴ For more on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century civic celebrations in the United States see Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

³⁰⁵ All quotations pertaining to the scene of the "Pioneers" are from MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 41-45.

seem to know how to make use of them. As for their marching, it serves neither a ritual purpose (as with the Moundbuilders), nor does it clear new territory. Once planted on the stage, the Pioneers remain fixed. Lacking new spaces to occupy and new borders to cross, they embody the “loss of the Frontier” theorized by Frederick Jackson Turner. Lacking common purpose and direction, they embody St. Louis’ allegedly alienated and divided immigrant population.

As if suddenly recognizing the urgent need to redefine his symbolic identity, one pioneer cries out to the dormant Saint Louis: “Our trails blaze with desire and danger and hope born of to-day. For tomorrow is dim and yesterday—dead. Now lead us to-day! Lead us, St. Louis!” In unison, the others echo: “Lead us, St. Louis!” Upon hearing the call of the Pioneers, Saint Louis, emerges from his shrine. Though a child in the first act, he is now a young knight clad from head to toe in white armor. He immediately agrees to lead them, but the Pioneers demand: “Show us your sign. Show us your sign!” Saint Louis then reveals the first of several symbols that propel the action of the second half of the *Masque*. He cries out: “See—this sword! Here on this mound I received it—a child, handed to me down from the night and the stars. Now for our day this shall be as an axe, yea, as a scythe, as a spade, and a lance, sharpened to serve and to lead you in fight.” The Pioneers spontaneously and unanimously cry: “Hail to the sword! Hail the sword!” Painted a brilliant white and standing at almost the same height as the actor playing Saint Louis, the sword animated the immense spaces of the pageant stage, directing both the movement of the Pioneers onstage and the attention of the audience on the hillside (figure 31). Like the Wild Nature Forces of the *Masque*’s first act, the Pioneers obey the sword; unlike them, however, the Pioneers will be transformed, rather than eliminated, by the power it commands.

What makes Saint Louis capable of leading the Pioneers is, tautologically, the fact that he bears the sign of leadership: the Sword. Thus, it seems, a leader is one who is capable of

presenting the people with symbols worth following. In fact, the sword's efficacy as a means of inaugurating and leading a specifically modern Public is so potent that, as Saint Louis implies, it effectively replaces all the work-day tools of the Pioneers. Placing repeated emphasis on the Sword as a tool "for our day," Saint Louis begins to transform the Pioneer from a figure identified with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century values of simplicity and tradition to one identified with twentieth-century values of progress and modernity.

In fact, the sword was a symbol drawn from the city's most important contemporary statue. Charles Henry Niehaus' *The Apotheosis of St. Louis*, which looked down on the pageant grounds from the top of Art Hill, pictured the city's namesake, Louis IX of France, riding his horse while holding an inverted sword. Erected only a decade earlier, the statue served both as a monument to the city's past and as a vision of modernity guided by faith. In the *Masque* the sword became an even more prominent symbol of progress. Just as in the poster for *The Pageant and Masque*, it matters little precisely where these Pioneers are headed or exactly why; it matters only that they move together, swiftly, forward. Indeed, from this scene on, the Pioneers do not move or act unless directed to do so by Saint Louis and his sword.

If these Pioneers cannot move forward on their own, they are at least capable of pledging their obedience to new leadership without hesitation. By performing spontaneous consensus rather than debate or protest and by demonstrating their willingness to be guided by symbols of civic patriotism rather than by articulations of policy, the Pioneers provide an onstage model of the kind of civic efficiency SLPDA members hoped St. Louisans would emulate offstage. In a cunning newspaper piece that discussed the relationship of the *Pageant and Masque* to the proposed charter reforms, one journalist wrote: "In the planning of the Pageant, it did not matter where the authors came from . . . no one had 'influence' or 'pull'; there was no contentious spirit

and no petty opportunism. For once the need for a civic enterprise was spontaneously conceded on all sides.”³⁰⁶

Though the Pioneers in this scene are exclusively male, the scene nevertheless resonates with an offstage episode centering on the issue of female participation in *The Pageant and Masque*. In an SLPDA Bulletin article addressed to the female population of St. Louis, casting coordinator Eugene Wilson promised: “It will be as easy to enroll . . . as it will to go to a polling place and vote. In the Casting Committee’s fifty registration “polling” places, women will not only be allowed to vote, they will be urged to do so.”³⁰⁷ For Wilson, the pageant is a kind of para-electoral institution in which even the disenfranchised can “vote” simply by volunteering to take part. By participating in the pageant, Wilson implies, the women of St. Louis can enact their desire and their readiness to become actual voters, a change that would not take place until 1920. In both the opening scene of the *Masque*’s second act, and in the symbolic scene of female suffrage imagined by Wilson, to vote is less to register one’s choice as an individual and more to perform one’s part in the formation of public consensus.

The meaning and purpose of popular participation was a matter of both practical politics and the aesthetics of the modern stage. The leaders of each of the three Pioneer groups were given typewritten instructions explaining where groups should assemble and giving precise cues for movement and choral speech. If taken individually, these prompt sheets are largely unexceptional. However, when read together, and in conjunction with the text of the *Masque*, the patterns that emerge reveal the degree to which the Pioneers function as an *automatic* Public. In other words, a Public formed not by the protracted conflicts and deliberations and reversals of

³⁰⁶ “How the Work was Done,” *St. Louis Star* (28 May 1914).

³⁰⁷ Eugene Wilson, “7,500 Saint Louisans Are to Be Stars in Great Play of the City’s History,” *Bulletin of the Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*, vol. 2, 6.

“public opinion,” but by a reflexive, nearly involuntary instinct to applaud the actions of civic leaders.³⁰⁸

What the Pioneers lack in the way of a capacity for reasoning, they make up for in displays of energy. The prompt sheets frequently instruct them to move swiftly from mound to mound and between various parts of the stage for no reason connected to the action of the scene. As in the poster for *The Pageant and Masque*, it seems to matter little in what direction they move or why they move; it matters only that they move together and that they do so with speed. Though their movement rarely indicates any particular accomplishment, it is itself evidence of an emerging, modern Public. Unlike English pageants (and their American imitators), which MacKaye regarded as “tending toward the static—and too little toward the dramatic,” the *Masque* sought to capture the dynamism of modern life, “expressing its themes by means of . . . large rhythmic mass-movements of onward urge, opposition, recoil and again the sweep onward.”³⁰⁹ If the measured, ritualized group movement of the Moundbuilders expressed the rhythms of ancient civilization, the velocity and urgency of the Pioneers’ numerous flights across the stage expressed the rhythms of the modern city.

However, once the Pioneer groups arrive at their appointed positions on the stage, their gestural vocabulary proves even more restricted than that of the Moundbuilders. Like the textile worker in the poster for *The Lawrence Pageant*, they are confined to gestures of deference and supplication. The prompt sheets instruct them to stand, half-kneel or kneel; to extend their arms up or out; to point towards symbols as they appear on stage—never anything else. Perhaps one of

³⁰⁸ Prompt Sheets (PMK Papers). The large cast was divided by episode into units and then into smaller groups. Each area of the enormous stage was marked by a different letter. The prompt sheets for the *Masque* are single sheets of paper, which give group leaders all the choral dialogue for their episode, as well as a list of movement cues.

³⁰⁹ MacKaye, “Worcester Address on Pageantry”; MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, xiv.

the only opportunities for creative self-expression or improvisation comes in the form of a repeated request, appearing in almost every prompt sheet, for performers playing Pioneers to “make a great show of interest” when any astonishing action occurs: for example, when the Earth Elements emerge from below ground, and when “War” is defeated.

Though they are encouraged to make some audible noise when these important events happen, their contribution to the spoken verse of the pageant is limited to repeating words spoken either by Saint Louis or by the lead Pioneer. In every instance, the echoes of the Pioneer chorus are either acclamatory or indicative. Indeed, after only a few repetitions of “Hail, St. Louis!” the “Hail” becomes unnecessary and the Pioneers have only to repeat the name “St. Louis” to express their adulation. Apart from cheering on their leader, the words of the Pioneer chorus serve to fix attention of spectators on various symbols: “Hail to the sword!”; “St. Louis! The Star!”; “Wings! The Wings!”³¹⁰ The prescribed range of movement and speech permitted to the Pioneers in the *Masque* indicates that being an active participant in civic life means being part of an appreciative and impressionable audience. It means performing one’s patriotism by recognizing symbols, manifesting visible and audible signs of reverence for them and also agreeing to be led by those who employ them. The reverence for symbols displayed by the Pioneers may be surprising because it paints a picture of a public that runs counter to the democratic ideals pageant-devisers claimed to champion; indeed, the public here not only lacks the ability to guide itself, it also lacks the ability to speak on its own and the creativity to invent its own symbols.

The *Masque*’s failure to imagine a public capable of articulating its own needs and of organizing itself might simply be written off as a generic effect were it not for the fact that the *Paterson Strike Pageant* had done precisely that just one year earlier. Staged in Madison Square

³¹⁰ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 45; 53; 80.

Garden by John Reed (with the help of some eighty or ninety other Greenwich Village radicals), the pageant was “performed by the strikers themselves” for the benefit of striking silk mill workers in Paterson, New Jersey.³¹¹ In scenes depicting exploitative labor practices, militant protests, and violent retaliation by company mercenaries, Paterson’s silk mill workers—most of them Italian immigrants—not only asserted their demands for justice, but also performed their own control over the narrative of the strike, which had for months been represented in the mainstream press as no less than a call for violent socialist revolution.

Though the two men were well-acquainted with one another, and corresponded with some regularity, Reed’s radicalism and MacKaye’s progressivism led to very different ideas concerning the relationship of pageantry’s form to its social purpose. Although some scholars have argued that *Paterson* served as a precursor to the Soviet pageants of the Civil War period (discussed in Chapter Four) it is nearer to the truth to say that both Reed’s concept of pageantry as protest and MacKaye’s concept of pageantry as collective dreaming are both implicated in the Soviet pageants of 1920. Indeed, Platon Kerzhentsev’s 1918 *Tvorcheskii Teatr* (*The Creative Theater*), the book credited with inspiring the new mass “mysteries” in Bolshevik Russia, proposed MacKaye’s *Masque* as a model for the new proletarian theater, without once mentioning *Paterson*—this, despite the fact that Reed was, by then, well known in Bolshevik circles.³¹²

MacKaye was not unknown in politically radical circles, but he firmly believed that lasting social reforms would not be won by inciting class warfare. As such, it is not surprising that MacKaye made no objection when the SLPDA refused the request of members of the Trades and Labor Union to include scenes of organized labor in the *Pageant and Masque*. In February, a

³¹¹ Glassberg, 130.

³¹² Platon Kerzhentsev, *Tvorcheskii Teatr* (Petrograd: Gos. Izd-vo, 1923): 28-30.

parade of five-hundred homeless St. Louisans called the “Pageant of the Unemployed” protested the sums to be spent on the pageant, asking that they instead be spent on the construction of municipal housing and the establishment of a public commissary. A columnist for *St. Louis Labor* suggested, facetiously, that the march should itself be included in the Pageant.³¹³

Though MacKaye cannot be credited with a belief in the ability of the working classes to act in their own best interests, he did share with his radical colleagues a belief that capitalism was the root cause of social unrest and, as such, a threat to the promise of democracy. Accordingly, the *Masque’s* public remains stunted in its development until it meets, and ultimately defeats, its absolutist and capitalist arch-enemy. Almost as soon as they choose Saint Louis to lead them, the Pioneers are impeded in their progress by “Gold,” who challenges the knight to set the strength of his followers against his slaves, the “Earth Elements”—Copper, Silver and Aluminum among others (figure 32).³¹⁴ On one hand, the relationship between the Earth Elements and Gold is a feudal one: Gold calls them his “serfs” and the Elements call him their “czar.” On the other hand, the Elements, wearing chains around their necks, also represent the modern industrial working class, toiling without rest in the service of industrialists who commanded much of the nation’s natural resources.³¹⁵ Whether one sees them as oppressed serfs, as a hardened American proto-proletariat, or both, the Earth Elements evoke adverse forms of collectivity against which the democratic principles of the *Masque’s* emerging Public may be defined.

During the extraordinary scene of wrestling that follows, Saint Louis’ Pioneers battle Gold’s Earth Elements on multiple levels of the stage. When the lead Pioneer loses the first of

³¹³ “St. Louis Homeless March,” *New York Times* (18 Feb 1914); Glassberg, 180.

³¹⁴ All quotations pertaining to the scene of Gold and the Earth Elements are from MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 46-55.

³¹⁵ McGerr, 3.

three matches, Saint Louis drops his sword. He shouts, “Rise Pioneer, and wear now this star! None can down Gold who fights for himself. Fight for our star! Wrestle well!” At that moment Saint Louis “*plucks a white star from his fillet and hands it, glowing, to the Wrestler, who places it on his own forehead, where it shines.*” He then picks up the sword again and uses it to signal the beginning of the second and third matches. These are won not only by the Pioneer wearing the star, but also by all the Pioneers on stage who collectively hail its power repeating: “Louis! St. Louis! The Star!”

The passing of any visible symbol from hand to hand in a pageant signals an important moment of recognition. As with the passing of the crown in an English pageant or with the passing of the red flag in Bolshevik pageants (discussed in Chapter Four), it is a moment in which all present—performers and spectators—can imaginatively take part. It imparts to each participant the idea that he or she is part of a unique public, distinct and separate from other publics. In the case of the *Masque*, the allegorical Saint Louis makes it clear that to fight for the victory of the collective, rather than for personal victory, means fighting under the sign of the white star. Indeed, Saint Louis’ “whiteness” is pronounced throughout the *Masque*; in early scenes he is repeatedly referred to as “the white child,” “the pale star-child” and as a descendant of the “star-born.” As such, the passing of the star to the Pioneer/Wrestler serves as a ritual of initiation in which the Pioneer is marked as white, thereby becoming capable of being integrated into the national imaginary.

As one of the “rituals of race” described by Alessandra Lorini, the *Masque of St. Louis* proposed to gather as many as possible under the sheltering canopy of whiteness in order to solve the problem of creating a cohesive public in an age of racial and ethnic conflict.³¹⁶ Wittingly or

³¹⁶ See Lorini, 236-243, and David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

unwittingly, the scene of the star emphasizes the symbolic character of whiteness, while at the same time asserting its very real authority to empower and protect those upon whom whiteness is conferred.³¹⁷ Though Saint Louis implies that the white star is available to all who would take it from him, the staging reveals that it, nevertheless, belongs only to him; he alone has the power to decide who can and cannot claim its authority.

“America” as the Dreaming Multitude

Whereas earlier episodes of the *Masque* work through processes of collective formation that, however abstract, point to established iconographic traditions, its final scenes aim towards an experimental concept of collectivity, one that aims to reconcile a Judeo-Christian conception of “the multitude” with the mystical operations of modern technology. When Gold, for the time being, accepts defeat, the Earth Elements transform into angels “clothed in fiery wings.”

Released from their elemental, material form, they become pure energy, bright heralds of the technological age who watch over the remainder of the *Masque* from their perches on the ramparts above the stage. This act of manumission allows the second major reversal in the *Masque* to take place as Saint Louis calls the new nation into existence: “Now freedom and strong brotherhood prevail/ Amongst us, and the souls of these be blown / World-far—

America!”³¹⁸ Then, “*an echo, magnified by a multitude of voice far away, a choral answer comes murmuring: “America!”*” From the background enters “*a multitude of men and women, garbed in the native costumes of all nations,*” led by the five World Adventurers: Europe, Australia, Asia, Oceania, and, last of all, Africa (figure 33). Once the enormous procession reaches its end, Europe “raises his standard from the lesser mound,” passes it to Saint Louis, and all pledge to “blend their blood and toil” with “young America.” For their part, the immigrant multitude

³¹⁷ On MacKaye and Americanization see Kahn, and also Mehler, 70-113.

³¹⁸ All quotations pertaining to the scene of “The World Adventurers” are from MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 56-59.

speaks only the word “America” in chorus, quietly accepting its role in a new narrative of (Western) civilization that subordinates all other nations to the United States.

Needless to say, the order in which the World Adventurers enter reflects a hierarchy of civilizations as seen from an Anglo-American perspective. What is more significant, then, is that in the moment Europe passes his flag to Saint Louis, the *Masque* legitimizes the role of the United States as the new standard-bearer of civilization. The idea that civilizations conform to processes of evolution and de-evolution similar to those of organic species was one to which MacKaye subscribed. Deriving these ideas from the works of Herbert Spencer and Lewis Henry Morgan, and modeling possible scenarios of degeneration on Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, many among the American intellectual elite took it for granted that European power was in a state of irreversible decline. Although moral and physical decay was seen as both natural and inevitable given conditions of overcrowding on the continent, it threatened to reach American shores via the mass migration of Europe’s working classes. Still, for progressives like MacKaye, who maintained a firm belief in plurality as a founding principle of American nationhood and in Europe as the birthplace of American culture, immigration restrictions and quotas did more harm than good.³¹⁹ In fact, European immigrants, with their allegedly “natural” historical sense and their ties to tradition, were seen as particularly well-suited to helping their new homeland develop its own cultural forms—pageants and masques among them.

For the quietly religious MacKaye, the cultural riches that the immigrant multitude carried with it was vitally necessary to America’s cultural productivity and its consequent development into a “world civilization.” Europe’s impending senescence means that the burden

³¹⁹ MacKaye’s interest in the Americanization of the immigrant masses was a dominant feature of his dramatic and theoretical works after 1914. He wrote *The New Citizenship: a Civic Ritual Devised for Places of Public Meeting in America* in 1915 and *The Immigrants, a Lyric Drama in Three Acts* in 1921. The former was a masque designed with the assumption that it would be adapted and performed throughout the country.

of caring for the world's poor and displaced peoples would necessarily devolve on the United States as a young, democratic and—significantly—*Christian* state. MacKaye repeated use of the word “multitude” in the concluding scenes of the *Masque* recalls, most vividly, the multitudes who gather to hear the Sermon on the Mount. Certainly, the name of the city, its patron saint, and the setting on Art Hill would not have escaped MacKaye as an opportunity to make use of a powerful and popular analogy.

In the last scenes of the *Masque*, collectivity is constituted less via its representation on stage in the form of fictional crowds and publics, than through an appeal to all assembled to recognize the collective act of imagination in which they have been engaged for several hours. The multitude addressed by Saint Louis (and hence MacKaye) is diverse in terms of language and ethnicity, and powerless to wield any economic or political influence, but is still capable of transcending these obstacles and barriers if awakened to a sacred sense of commonality.³²⁰ If MacKaye's *Masque* has at times seemed little more than an overly elaborate civics lesson, it begins at this point to open onto a more expansive, if uncertain, vision of the future—one that depends less on consolidating state power or national character than on creating the conditions for sacred, collective revelation to take place. Notably, when the *Masque* turns to address spiritual concerns, female performers serve as prominent figures of both extreme deprivation and decisive liberation.

In a scene eerily belied by the First World War, which began just one month after the

³²⁰ MacKaye's use of the word multitude reflects both its prevalence in the King James Version of the Christian Bible as well as its imperial connotations. In *The Crowd* Gustave Le Bon proposes the idea that multitudes are not the same as peoples because they are multiracial and multilingual. As such, the only common bonds they can maintain are the result of a powerful leader (Le Bon, 157). Whereas peoples are the proper subjects of nations, multitudes are the subjects of empires. Although MacKaye's multitude superficially resembles the figure of the multitude in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's two books (*Empire* and *Multitude*), the many differences are significant. Most important to an understanding of the limitations of MacKaye's conception is that Hardt and Negri demand a multitude that precisely refuses the transcendent and utopian reconstructions at the heart of MacKaye's *Masque*, instead relying on its immanent labor practices and the way these reshape the material world. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press), 102-106.

Masque, all the nations together defeat Gold's younger brother, War. Although the *Masque* seems set to close at the end of this tremendous battle, with America, led by Saint Louis, at the height of its powers, there remains one last battle to be won. As War makes his exit, his place on stage is taken by the masked female figure of Poverty, and her children: Vice, Plague and Rebellion.³²¹ MacKaye describes them as a "*dun-colored pageant*," composed of "*crowds of haggard women and forlorn children, old men bowed over, and young men darkly brooding*." The masses plead with Saint Louis to save them from their husband and father, Gold, who returns even more powerful, as a figure of death cloaked in black. Saint Louis agrees to fight Gold on behalf of Poverty and her children, calling upon his "Brother Cities" to take part. Characters including "Washington," "New York" and "Chicago" enter with their retinues, and a new battle ensues. Gold, however, remains unconquerable despite the massive armies that have been set against him. The impotence of the world's armies in this episode distinguishes MacKaye's *Masque* from those pageants produced after the start of the war in Europe, which routinely ended in a call to battle. It reflects MacKaye's firm antiwar views and his belief, argued in *A Substitute for War*, that pageantry could provide the masses with a way to express their feelings for community, tribe, and nation without resorting to murder on a mass scale. Only the poet-dramatist, not the politician, MacKaye believed, had the creative capacity to "lure the imaginations of men away from war to peace."³²² Consequently, when Washington recognizes that Gold's defeat will require powers beyond his command, he calls upon the *Masque's* last allegorical character to appear.

Responding to Washington's call, Imagination appears as "a noble female Form, masked

³²¹ All quotations pertaining to the scenes of "Poverty," the "Brother Cities," and "Imagination" are from MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 65-78.

³²² MacKaye, *A Substitute for War* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 23.

in serene beauty” (figure 34). She scoffs at the Brother Cities for believing that massive armies could release Gold’s hold on Poverty. Searching among Poverty’s many children she finds a small boy called “Love.” The climactic conquest of the *Masque*—the conquest of capitalist greed by the world’s creative and spiritual forces—occurs when Imagination encourages Love to confront Gold, who at once concedes defeat in the presence of Love’s transcendent innocence.

That it is, in the end, a female character who is able to locate a peaceful solution to worldwide political conflict expresses the *Masque*’s progressive era ideal of the woman reformer as uniquely capable of “envisioning a new humane state identified with the values of the home rather than the marketplace.”³²³ In fact, Edna Fischel Gellhorn, who played the role of Imagination, was a well-known St. Louis suffragist who later became the first vice-president of the National League of Women Voters, which she helped to establish. The casting of Gellhorn as the heroic female counterpart to the Knight Saint Louis spoke to the strong ties between the pageantry movement and the suffragist movement. As was the case in English pageantry of the same period, pageants not only offered women of European descent opportunities to use their skills and knowledge, but also a means to perform their membership in the Public. Many more women than men performed in MacKaye’s *Masque* and many others were responsible for the design and construction of costumes and properties. MacKaye’s sister, Hazel, was a pageant director in her own right who had lent her considerable skills to a series of suffrage pageants in the year before the *Masque*.³²⁴ Keeping in mind that even Hazel MacKaye’s suffrage pageants strategically balanced traditional images of the “feminine ideal” with more muscular and modern images of “feminism,” MacKaye’s portrayal of Imagination as a maternalistic pacifist operating

³²³ Nancy S. Dye, “Introduction,” in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds. *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 2.

³²⁴ See Karen Blair, “Pageantry for Women’s Rights: The Career of Hazel MacKaye, 1913-1923,” *Theatre Survey*, vol. 31 (May 1990).

outside the male-dominated political sphere is less naïve than it may at first seem. At a minimum it proposes the view that women may prove more capable than men in finding solutions to contemporary social problems since, like Poverty and her children, they have the most to lose if progress is stalled.

If Gellhorn's appearance on the vast Forest Park stage recalled, however obliquely, the *Masque's* political affiliations, the *Masque's* final scene marks a decisive turn away from the realities of the political stage and towards the intellectual abstractions of the symbolist stage. The actor playing Saint Louis embodies this turn when, for the first time in the performance, he directly addresses the thousands of spectators occupying Forest Park. He calls upon "the multitude" he sees assembled there to "shape the sordid world/ To likeness of our dreams. For 'tis a little/ When we, too, like Cahokia, shall lie down/ And this our city be a silent mound/ Silent, save over all – the chanting stars!" Although the immigrant multitude "America" that enters in the train of the World Adventurers is passive, helpless, and child-like, the multitude Saint Louis calls upon in the last moment of the *Masque* is one defined by its capacity for collective dreaming. Saint Louis' final words direct the eyes of the multitude skywards.

Although the *Masque* as performed concluded with Saint Louis calling upon all present to join in song with the Chorus of Stars, the original, never-performed final scene written by MacKaye underscores the distance between the poet-dramatist's ideal of the dreaming multitude and the complex realities that defined the conditions of mass spectatorship as it existed, as it were, "on the ground" in 1914 St. Louis. For a host of reasons, the scene proved too technologically complex to be staged; still MacKaye saw it as so central to an understanding of his social and artistic vision that it was included in all published versions of the *Masque*. The scene required a "gigantic Bird" to fly over the stage, part the sea of performers in two, "swoop

down upon the multitude, circle above, and then finally to rise higher and higher” until it disappears “scattering wild fire in its wake.”³²⁵ MacKaye described the means by which this *coup de théâtre* was to be achieved: “In configuration and color an eagle, the bird, of course, is an aeroplane serving thus for the first time as a symbol of dramatic poetry. The sparkles in its wake are varicolored fireworks, shot off as it soars.”³²⁶ What MacKaye proposes here is to reinvent the traditional American fireworks display as a mythical gesture confirming the place of technological innovation within the American imaginary.

Spectacular effect is, of course, part of the appeal of this moment, but the flight of the airplane Eagle is also integral to MacKaye’s project, as described in *The Civic Theatre*, to steer the attention of spectator-crowds away from the lurid, commercial attractions of the modern city, and towards a collective vision of liberation that is necessarily both technological and spiritual. The *Masque* seeks to instill new habits of spectatorship by “removing the audience in imagination from its hill-top to a viewpoint of even larger vantage—to the bird’s eye view of the horizon’s rim.”³²⁷ For MacKaye, the moment that the *Masque* performs its greatest technological feat will also be the height of the *Masque*’s contribution to symbolist poetics because it will have impressed the greatest wonder of the modern era into the service of poetry instead of war.³²⁸ Furthermore, the techno-symbolism of the airplane Eagle serves democratic ends, for when the *Masque*’s performers and spectators turn their eyes to the stage of the night sky, they become an “audience in imagination,” each individual spectator standing at an equal distance from a spectacle that eliminates all other spectators from view while sustaining a frictionless,

³²⁵ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 80; “Man Eagle Sought by Poet MacKaye,” *New York Times* (1 April 1914).

³²⁶ MacKaye, *Saint Louis*, 80.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

disembodied form of collective dreaming. In MacKaye's unrealized vision, the dreaming of the multitude manifests as a desire to take flight, and the airplane Eagle is the concrete result of that dreaming. That the airplane had to exist in the human imagination before it could exist in reality proves, for MacKaye, that the symbolist imagination far exceeds realist representation in its ability to nurture the collective mind.

Conclusion

If MacKaye hoped that the *Masque's* spectator-crowd would look up to the sky and imagine a future transformed, the principal view of the *Masque* as reproduced in the local press was of the spectators themselves. Between 125,000 and 150,000 saw the *Masque* on each night of its performance, except for its Saturday performance, which exceeded 200,000 spectators. Even more saw the *Masque* during its week of full rehearsals prior to performance. St. Louis papers attempted to give their readers an experience of the *Masque's* scale by printing full-page spreads that featured panoramic photographs of the audience and oversized headlines. The test of any pageant's success was the degree to which it could hold the attention of the restless spectator-crowd. As such, many accounts of the performances of the *Pageant and Masque* remarked on the degree to which St. Louisans were willing to give their attention to an event which so many had presumed they could not understand. Spectators reportedly sat silent through unusually hot summer days just to watch pageant rehearsals, stood in the rain for many hours to gain access to the pageant grounds and climbed dangerously high into trees to get the best viewing spots.

George Pierce Baker in his lengthy review focuses his attention on the attention of the audience. Sitting amongst the minority of spectators who paid for their seats, Baker describes spectators arriving two-thirds of the way through the *Pageant* and chattering through the Prelude. From Baker's perspective, these are leisure-seekers out for an evening of entertainment, unaware

that they are participating in a civic ritual. The *Masque*, however, eventually manages to work its magic on this group of spectators; they grow quiet as the performance continues and turn back to look at the stage once more before silently walking away. For Baker, this transformation provides evidence that “beauty of thought, stirring historical event, and interpretive imagination had won out against misunderstanding, indifference, and idle curiosity.”³²⁹ The *Masque* has, in his view, sparked a moment of collective attention that may, if repeated often enough, be mobilized for social purposes.

Turning again, however, to the St. Louis press, it seems clear that although the *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* was able to dominate the attention of St. Louisans for several months both before and after its four evening performances at the end of May 1914, the ongoing spectacle of modern urban life not only continued undeterred but, in many ways, refracted and reflected whatever facets of the pageant made for the most sensational photographs or “newsy” items. Local papers reported everything from women overcome by heat, children lost in crowds, horses run astray, and water boys mobbed by thirsty spectators. Far from the ideal of MacKaye’s *Civic Theatre*, spectators at one performance broke through seating barriers causing a momentary brawl while some members of the *Pageant and Masque*’s chorus were welcomed onstage at one of the city’s vaudeville houses after an evening performance.

Ultimately, MacKaye’s *Masque*, like so many previous civic entertainments, was absorbed into the spectacle it promised to transcend. Still, the critical and popular success of the *Pageant and Masque* was unsurpassed by any previous or subsequent event to emerge from the American Pageantry movement. Its political and social success, however, was mixed. On the one hand, the passing of the controversial charter led to a stronger concentration of authority in the mayor’s office, fewer elected and more appointed positions, and rezoning provisions that

³²⁹ Baker, 391.

narrowed participation in the political process, especially in working-class districts of the city. On the other hand, it directly led to the establishment of the St. Louis Municipal Opera Company, the expansion of nearly all of St. Louis' public arts programs, and the construction of a permanent outdoor amphitheater in Forest Park that is still in use today. MacKaye's *Masque* did re-energize the American pageantry movement for some time to come, but it did not lead to national implementation of his Civic Theatre program as he hoped. Like Steele MacKaye's Spectatorium, Percy MacKaye's Civic Theatre remains one the most ambitious projects imagined by an American artist.

After the First World War, the energy of pageant movement began to wane as it disintegrated into a variety of different enterprises, some driven by commercial interests and others by wartime fervor. Both of these had been anathema to the academic dramatists who had championed pageantry before the war. Although historical pageants were still performed throughout the country, the sense of a "movement" had been lost; along with it, according to those who had championed pageantry in the prewar period, the necessity of maintaining high artistic standards had also disappeared. For artists like MacKaye, who had pinned their vision of an emerging American theater to the art of pageantry, the new commercial pageants were a profound disappointment. Their promoters generally allowed no scope for experimentation and therefore little chance of artistic reward. Most of the well-known pageant-devisers of the prewar period began slowly to distance themselves from the genre in the 1920s. Though, for his part, MacKaye would continue to develop his ideas of the relationship between theater and social reform in numerous books, lectures, and plays the "audience in imagination" that he had invented as an ideal mass spectator for his artistic vision had transformed almost completely into a cinema audience by the 1920s. The twin genres of pageant and masque through which he had

hoped the American masses would come to recognize their collective spirit left their aesthetic imprint on nearly everything MacKaye would have rejected, from the blockbusters of D.W. Griffith and Cecil B. Demille, to the “bathing beauty pageants” promoted throughout the country in the 1920s.

Chapter Four

“We Must Maneuver”: From Peasants to Proletariat in *Towards a World Commune*

History in general, the history of revolutions in particular, has always been richer, more varied and variform, more vital and ingenious than is conceived of by the most conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes.

V.I. Lenin, “*Left Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920)³³⁰

Early on the morning of July 19th, 1920 delegates to the Second Congress of the Third Communist International (Comintern) endured a tongue-lashing from Lenin.³³¹ Reiterating arguments he had made in the recently published “*Left Wing*” *Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, Lenin accused “left communists” of attempting to incite revolution across Europe without first creating the conditions in which revolution could succeed. “The problem of the day for a class-conscious vanguard,” he declared, “is to be able to bring the general mass—still, in the majority of cases, slumbering, apathetic, hidebound and ignorant—to their new position” as a revolutionary proletariat.³³² In order to achieve this objective, socialists must go beyond conventional, direct forms of propaganda and learn to deal strategically with the masses by means of “compromises, maneuvers, zigzags, retreat and so on.”³³³ The most successful forms of revolutionary activity, Lenin insists, will be discovered by combining strategic thinking and efficient organization with a spirit of experimentation. His habit of repeating the same point in a

³³⁰ Lenin, *Left Wing*” *Communism: an Infantile Disorder*. (Detroit: The Marxian Educational Society, 1921), 94.

³³¹ The Third or Communist International (abbreviated as Comintern) was an international socialist organization created in March 1919. It succeeded the Second International, which had split along national lines as the First World War began, and dissolved in 1916. Reinvigorated by the success of the Bolsheviks in late 1917, the International reformed with the explicit intent to “hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world.” “Manifesto of the First Congress of the Third International, 1919” quoted in Duncan Hallas, *Comintern* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007), 10.

³³² Lenin, 93.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 91.

seemingly infinite variety of ways must have worn down his audience. Alfred Rosmer, a member of the French delegation, wearily reported that the essential meaning of the lengthy speech could be whittled down to just five words: “We must learn to maneuver.”³³⁴

While Rosmer’s day began with an (over)emphasis on the idea that the vanguard of the proletariat must learn how to maneuver the masses towards proletarian consciousness, it ended with an even more prolific and literal display of mass maneuvers in the performance of *Towards a World Commune* (*K mirovoi kommune*). Starting at ten o’clock that evening and continuing on until four in the morning, four thousand Red Army soldiers, factory workers, theater school students, professional actors, dancers and circus artists occupied the portals of the former St. Petersburg Stock Exchange in order to enact a historical pageant of Socialism for an audience of 45,000 spectators (figure 35). Watching the spectacle from a viewing stand specially constructed for Comintern officials, Rosmer marveled at how easily the great crowd filled the enormous square in front of the Stock Exchange. *Commune’s* epic depiction of “the march of socialism through struggle and defeat to victory,” the ceaseless energy of its largely amateur cast, and the ostensibly unflagging attention of its spectators was for Rosmer “an act of faith that made a worthy conclusion to a day full of emotion.”³³⁵

Although it has been frequently overshadowed by the achievements of its more famous successor, *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920), *Towards a World Commune* was praised for the creativity and efficiency with which its team of five directors guided the movement of four thousand performers, moving them quickly and in complex formations across multiple staging areas for close to six hours. Its expansive use of urban space and its technological methods of organization, combined with staging and performance techniques developed in the

³³⁴ Alfred Rosmer, *Moscow under Lenin* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 53.

³³⁵ Ibid., 67-68.

studios of Vsevolod Meyerhold assured its status as a model for Soviet mass pageants well into the latter half of the twentieth century.³³⁶ The connection between Lenin's metaphorical maneuvers and *Commune's* mass choreography is, I propose, not purely rhetorical. This chapter argues that in fact the movement patterns performed by *Commune's* "mass actor"—a concept I discuss below—expressed a utopian goal shared by political and cultural elites in the post-revolutionary period: to transform Russia's "backwards" peasantry (dormant, bent, rigid, mute and insensate) into a modern proletariat (dynamic, flexible, vocal, responsive and hyper-vigilant).

Although many scholars of Soviet culture and politics, like Peter Kenez, have remarked that "pageants [of this kind], unique to a revolutionary state, aimed to create a new humanity for living in a new society," only a few have asked how pageants pursued this goal in practice.³³⁷ From the perspectives of technique, what distinguishes Russian Civil War pageants from both American and English pageants is not that the latter were "historical" while the former were "revolutionary," but that whereas American and Edwardian pageant crowds seem to be constructed for the still photograph, periodically gathering for grand tableaux, Russian Civil War pageant crowds, always on the move, appear far better suited to film. *Towards a World Commune* challenged its spectators to keep up with performers in near constant motion. As described in first-hand accounts, the movement of *Commune's* crowds seems always to take precedence over their shape, and the execution of their maneuvers seems to matter far more than

³³⁶ The production of *Towards a World Commune* had a significant impact on later pageants for two reasons. First, because it had been performed for an international audience, it was widely discussed in memoirs and in travel literature of the period by Europeans and Americans who had been present at the event. Within the USSR, *Commune's* lasting influence was a result of the fact Kerzhentsev chose it, and not *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, as an exemplar of the mass pageant form in the 1923 edition of his immensely popular book, *The Creative Theater*. In that edition, Kerzhentsev reproduced both the scenario of the pageant, as well as a page from the score created by its directors.

³³⁷ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 12.

their destination. *Commune* is ultimately much more about *how* its masses move, rather than where they are going.³³⁸

Thus, by contrast with existing scholarship that interprets the pageants either as performances marking political goals, or as performances succeeding or failing to generate communal experiences, I interpret them here as training maneuvers—rehearsals of collective transformation aimed at re-inventing the social order by conditioning participants to become more adaptive, more flexible and more responsive to the demands of the collective as well as to the demands of the modern age. I argue that *Commune*'s mass choreography represents a mythical evolution of the Russian collective body from procession-bound *toilers* (the peasant masses) to dynamic revolutionary *crowds* to a marching *proletariat*. Although the majority of the pageant is devoted to the repetition of a single cyclical pattern—the transformation of oppressed masses into revolutionary crowds and then back into oppressed masses—by the pageant's end the only collective political actor capable of putting an end to this cycle is the army. What ultimately emerges as the ideal form of the proletariat in *Towards a World Commune* is a highly organized, disciplined and coordinated collective body modeled on the Red Army at march.

³³⁸ Both James von Geldern in *Bolshevik Festivals* and František Deák in "Russian Mass Spectacles" (*The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 19, no. 2, June 1975, 7-22) summarize first-hand accounts of the performance in their studies. Unfortunately, Deák's article includes no information on the sources he uses. Consequently, James von Geldern's thorough bibliography serves as my own. My description is based on the following first-hand accounts: Maria Fedorovna Andreeva, *Perepiska, vospominaniia: Stat'i, dokumenty, vospominaniia o M. F. Andreevoi* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), 419-20, 435-36; Alexander Belenson, "K mirovoi kommune," *Zhizn' Iskusstva*, July 23, 1920; Aleksandr Belenson, "Vokrug dvukh mirov," *Zhizn' Iskusstva*, July 21, 1920; Dora Black, quoted in Bertrand Russell, *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1920), 57-64; René Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism; an Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia* (Harper & Row, 1965), 146-148; Georgii Guryev, "Eshche o massovykh postanovkakh," *Zhizn' Iskusstva*, September 1, 1920; *Istoriia sovetskogo teatra* (Leningrad: Akademia, 1933), 271-78; B.V. Iudin, E. Shchedrin, and S. Belousov, *Massovye prazdnestva* (Moscow: Krestianskaia zhizn', 1935), 66-70; P.M. Kerzhentsev, *Tvorcheskii Teatr* (Petrograd: Gos. Izd-vo, 1923), 28-30; Sergei Kozakevich, "V masshtabakh otkrytogo neba," *Zhizn' Iskusstva*, November 5, 1920; P. Kudelli, "Novoe zrelishe na portale Fondovoi Birzhi," *Petrogradskaia Pravda*, July 21, 1920; Lev Nikulin, *Zapiski sputnika* (Moscow: Sovetskaia literatura, 1933), 62-65; Nikolai Petrov, *50 i 500* (Moscow: VTO, 1960), 188-92; Adrian Piotrovsky, *Za sovetskii teatr* (Leningrad: Akademia, 1925), 12-14; Alfred Rosmer, *Moscow under Lenin*, trans. Ian H. Birchall (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972): 66-68; *Russkii-sovetskii teatr, 1917-1921: Dokumenty i materialy* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1968), 268-71; Viktor Shklovsky, *Knight's Move*, trans. Richard Robert Sheldon (Normal, Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005), 51-53.

Pageant Year in Petrograd: the Party, the Artists and the Acquisition of Culture

At the beginning of 1921 a Moscow theater club performed an agit-trial in which the year 1920 was accused of inflicting great suffering on the Russian people. It had been the most vicious year of the post-revolutionary crisis called the Civil War (1917-1921) and although much of the worst violence was behind them, Russians continued to struggle in conditions of extreme poverty and widespread disease.³³⁹ Despite the damning evidence presented in the agit-trial, the year 1920 “managed to acquit itself eloquently, insisting that it had paved the way to a more optimistic period.”³⁴⁰ One of the major points in its favor may have been the production of four astonishingly optimistic mass pageants that took place over the course of seven months in Petrograd. *The Mystery of Liberated Labor*, directed by Iury Annenkov and performed in May in the portals of the former Stock Exchange building was followed in June by *The Blockade of Russia*, which took place on the newly christened “Vacation Island.” *Blockade’s* director, Sergei Radlov, would take part in directing *Towards a World Commune* only one month later. The last, and most famous of the pageants this year, *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, was directed by Nikolai Evreinov and a host of assistants. It occupied the entirety of Uritsky Square for the purpose of re-creating the final battle of the October Revolution on the occasion of its third anniversary (November 7).

The success of the Petrograd pageants spread quickly; mass pageants were soon being produced in cities throughout the newly created RSFSR. Given their widespread popularity and

³³⁹ Studies estimated that deaths from disease, war and hunger in the years between 1918 and 1921 were between 7 and 8 million. Evan Mawdsley remarks that “This is bound up less with Red troops fighting White troops or Cheka executions; what killed most were the dreadful epidemics. The official statistics show 890,000 deaths from typhus and typhoid in 1919, and 1,044,000 in 1920 (compared to 63,000 in 1917). In addition to that there was dysentery, cholera, and *Ispanka*, the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918-1919. The effects of hunger were tremendous. One source estimated that three million or more deaths could have come from higher child mortality.” Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Allen & Unwin, 1987), 287.

³⁴⁰ Mally, *Revolutionary Acts: Amateur Theater and the Soviet State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 43.

the fact that enormous sums were spent on their production during a period of severe economic crisis, surveys of post-revolutionary culture rarely fail to describe, however briefly, the mass pageants as works of propaganda “designed to produce a historical genealogy for the October Revolution.”³⁴¹ Although valid to an extent, this simplified explanation glosses over the complex relationship between theater and politics in the immediate post-revolutionary period. For example, in *Telling October* (2004) Frederick Corney explains the emergence of mass pageantry by claiming that “radical artists (Vsevolod Meyerhold and the Proletkultists among them) declared traditional theater to be a new front in the Civil War and strove to invent new dramatic forms to replace the old.”³⁴² However, as Katerina Clark rightly points out in *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (1995), Meyerhold and his contemporaries in the proletarian culture movement (Prolekult) had been developing theories of mass participatory theater for more than a decade prior to the October Revolution.

Looking specifically at the work of theater artists, James von Geldern in *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1921* (1993), Katerina Clark, in *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* and Erika Fischer-Lichte in *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theater* (2005) agree that political explanations for the emergence of mass pageants are not entirely convincing, mainly because party policy did not dictate the terms on which the theaters operated when the Bolsheviks first came to power. As Clark puts it, “few [party members] had the time or the inclination, in these extreme times of civil war, to oversee the development of a proletarian or revolutionary culture.”³⁴³ Moreover, according to Sheila Fitzpatrick “the artistic world,

³⁴¹ Frederick Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 75.

³⁴² Ibid., 73.

³⁴³ Clark, 101.

particularly in Petrograd, was bent on autonomy and took little account of the actual intentions of the Soviet government towards art.”³⁴⁴ Even in the case of performances like *Commune*, which were specifically subsidized for the purposes of agitation and which, therefore, were carefully regulated with respect to narrative content, theater artists living in the chaotic aftermath of the October Revolution preserved primary control over their productions.

In *Bolshevik Festivals*, James von Geldern acknowledges that responsibility “for [the pageants’] shape, content, and the message they conveyed to spectators belonged more to artists and directors than to politicians/sponsors, who offered little concrete guidance.”³⁴⁵ Nevertheless, von Geldern’s brief discussion of *Commune* offers little analysis of the pageant’s shape, content or message and instead makes a general claim that its purpose was to mark Russia as the center of the international socialist revolution.³⁴⁶ Like von Geldern, Katerina Clark sees the mass pageants primarily as the work of directors. However, her work departs from the general trend of scholarship on pageants in that its interest lies in defining their intellectual provenance rather than their political function. For Clark, the mass pageants “tried to create a genealogy for the new state but inscribed it into narratives—not all of which were concerned with political revolution—that had captivated the imagination of intellectuals.”³⁴⁷ She argues that, rather than Marx and Lenin, Wagner and Nietzsche were the true ideological forefathers of the pageants. Her investigations into the scholarly training of pageant-devisers leads her to the argument that pageants were inspired by a “German dream of Greek wholeness” that was transmitted to pageant-devisers through the works of Wagner and Nietzsche, as interpreted in the writings of

³⁴⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment: Soviet Organization of Education and the Arts Under Lunacharsky, October 1917-1921* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 113.

³⁴⁵ von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 8.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 185.

³⁴⁷ Clark, 127-128.

Vyacheslav Ivanov and Faddey Zelinsky.³⁴⁸

Although they arrive at different conclusions concerning their significance, both von Geldern and Clark approach the mass pageants in terms of how they bring together various strands of revolutionary culture. While von Geldern's book aims to provide "an overview of the mass festivals that discusses the theoretical issues of culture raised by their study," Clark argues that "in the story of their staging can be traced some of the contradictions between the theory and practice of revolution."³⁴⁹ The broad perspective adopted by both authors favors a synthetic approach to the interpretation of pageants, and limited engagement with particular performances. As such, both books select examples from a wide range of pageants in order to identify themes and motifs relevant to their arguments, but neither offers a sustained interpretation of any pageant produced during the period of the Civil War.

A closer examination of the connections between theory and practice in two pageants of the Civil War period is undertaken by Erika Fischer-Lichte in *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*. Her primary argument—that pageants emerged from a widespread desire for communal experience felt throughout Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—is grounded in the often expressed aim of Russian theatrical reformers of the period to do away with footlights and forestages and thereby begin to break down the actor-spectator divide. Accordingly, Fischer-Lichte asks how the organization of space, the movement of bodies within the space, and "the way a particular atmosphere functions" contributed or failed to contribute to the emergence of communal experience in a pageant.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 139. On the influence of Nietzsche in Russia, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2002). On the influence of Wagner, see Rosamund Bartlett, *Wagner and Russia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

³⁴⁹ von Geldern, 6; Clark, 124.

³⁵⁰ Fischer-Lichte, 52.

Fischer-Lichte attributes the success of the first of the Civil War pageants, Nicholas Vinogradov-Mamont's *Overthrow of Autocracy* (1919), to the fact that "the interplay of the three devices [space, movement, atmosphere] resulted in lively audience participation."³⁵¹ She concludes that, as a result, *Overthrow's* performers and spectators were able in the end to "act out a new collective identity that had emerged out of their participation in the performance, i.e. in a self-organized and self-organizing community of which the spectators had become part by spontaneously joining in the singing and the procession of the performers."³⁵² Combining improvisational techniques, slogans and songs with well-known civic and military rituals, the pageant was performed for soldiers by other "actor-soldiers" who had received training in the theatrical workshops organized by the Red Army and by Proletkult.³⁵³ By contrast with *Overthrow*, Nikolai Evreinov's *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1920), was unsuccessful in Fischer-Lichte's view because the spectators were cordoned off from the action and because they "were exposed to the gaze of other spectators" who were seated on a raised platform behind them.³⁵⁴ According to Fischer-Lichte, spectators "felt separated from the action, from the possibility of participating, by being cordoned off; and they sensed that they were being watched when they looked up to the stand in their turn."³⁵⁵

Fischer-Lichte's analysis of the pageants considers spontaneous actor-spectator interaction and bodily participation in the act of performance to be of primary importance in assessing their value. From that perspective, all pageants after *Overthrow* (therefore, all of them)

³⁵¹ Ibid., 107.

³⁵² Ibid., 109.

³⁵³ *The Overthrow of Autocracy* is treated in some detail in von Geldern, 125-132, and in Fischer-Lichte, 103-111.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 118.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 119.

will prove to be abject failures. Like the Festival of Federation in post-revolutionary France (mentioned briefly in Chapter One) the kind of unified, collective affirmation of revolutionary identity that apparently took place during *Overthrow's* performance on March 12, 1919 proved to be an anomaly. The numerous differences between *Overthrow* and all subsequent pageants (including *Towards a World Commune* and *The Storming of the Winter Palace*) invite an important question. If it is true that the primary aim of mass pageants was, as Fischer-Lichte argues, to create conditions conducive to the spontaneous emergence of communal identity, and if the very first of the post-revolutionary pageants appeared to have hit upon the correct formula for doing so right from the very beginning, why then would pageant-devisers after *Overthrow* have moved farther and farther away from Vinogradov-Mamont's relatively intimate, austere, indoor and improvisational model of collective performance and towards increasingly massive, spectacular and strictly organized open-air pageants on the model of *Towards a World Commune*?³⁵⁶

The most tempting explanation is that the party began to exercise greater control over pageants as their popularity increased. However, von Geldern's categorical statement that "the politicians did not make the festivals" remains accurate, at least until the end of the Civil War in 1921.³⁵⁷ A more convincing explanation, and one that therefore invites a different approach to the analysis of Civil War mass pageants than that proposed by Erika Fischer-Lichte, is that pageant-devisers in this period did not intend the mass pageants to serve as opportunities for the emergence of spontaneous communal experience. Rather, I concur with Clark's argument that

³⁵⁶ Other scholars have recognized this pattern of development. See, for example, Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams, Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 97-98.

³⁵⁷ Clark (143-161) and von Geldern (211-219) agree that the introduction of the New Economic Plan (NEP) in 1921 limited the experimentation of the mass pageants and brought them under the direct control of the Party.

although pageant-devisers and dutiful observers perpetuated images of the pageants as spontaneous, iconoclastic rituals, of joyous mass celebrations of the overthrow of the old order, in reality “neither the powers that be [i.e. the Party] *nor the intellectuals* [my emphasis] would be content with just unfocused liminality; something more educative was required.”³⁵⁸

Russia’s intellectual elite—in which Clark includes “theater activists” like Meyerhold and his circle of students and colleagues—believed that more than a century under the triple-yoke of the tsar, the church and the bourgeoisie had left the working masses psychologically and physically crippled.³⁵⁹ They placed the blame for this largely on the popular theater of the imperial era. As early as 1882 Alexander Ostrovsky had called for the development of new forms of drama that would protect the people from the crassness of vaudeville and commercial melodrama.³⁶⁰ By 1918, many were in agreement with the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky (who was himself a playwright), that the masses, if left to devise their own theatrical forms, would likely choose “circuses, buffoonery, sloppy sentimentality and bad farce.”³⁶¹ Pursuing an analogy with Lenin’s theory of the political vanguard, Lunacharsky issued a warning to those (mostly Proletkultists) who were already urging the masses to invent their own artistic forms:

A people steeped in ignorance cannot receive full self-rule, and the prerequisite for popular sovereignty is the enlightenment of those very same masses to whom this power is to be entrusted. Until then, for the present, the solution of enlightened absolutism must be chosen. There must be rule by the people’s vanguard, by that part of the people which represents the interests of the majority,

³⁵⁸ Clark, 126.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁶⁰ Ostrovsky, quoted in Lars Kleberg, “People’s Theater and the Revolution,” in *Nils Åke Nilsson, ed. Art, Society, Revolution, 1917-1921* (Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, vol. 11, 1979), 180.

³⁶¹ Francis McCullagh, *A Prisoner of the Reds, the Story of a British Officer Captured in Siberia* (London: J. Murray, 1922), 218. Lunacharsky’s theories and his contributions to early Soviet culture are discussed throughout Fitzpatrick, *Commissariat of Enlightenment*.

correctly understood, by that part of the people which is its creative force. [. . .] Now, when we are advancing, not against the German garrisons, but against the bourgeois system of the entire world, they already pronounce our names with respect in the West, [and] look at us as cultured people. When representatives of foreign states come here, they see that in our hands now there is a new force which is striving to raise the people to the very highest level of culture.³⁶²

As many scholars have pointed out, the acquisition of culture (*kultura*)—of urban (i.e. Western European) rather than peasant (i.e. Russian) habits and manners—was seen as vital to the spread of socialism, as well as a good in itself. In order to teach “the mass of the people, who have for so many centuries remained distant from cultural life,” to appreciate “all that which is dear to enlightened people” would require the leadership of those members of the *intelligentsia* with special talents.³⁶³

Precisely how specialists in theater—“that part of the people which is its creative force”—ought to help the masses to acquire *kultura* was a matter of heated debate. Many, including playwrights like Lunacharsky, held the conservative view that what the masses needed most was greater exposure to ennobling plays of the European dramatic canon: plays by Shakespeare, Schiller and Corneille were thought to be particularly enlightening and educative.³⁶⁴ However, by contrast with Lunacharsky, and also by contrast with pageant-devisers in England the United States, those who directed the Petrograd pageants of 1920 (all influential members of Meyerhold’s circle) believed that reviving old forms of theater, which carried with them the contagion of bourgeois habits and ideas, would only hinder the development of an authentic revolutionary culture. Against the old literary culture (“let it lie undisturbed in the

³⁶² Lunacharsky, “Speech to the First All Russian Congress on Education,” in *Bolshevik Visions: the First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia: vol. 2, Creating Soviet Cultural Forms: Art, Architecture, Music, Film and the New Tasks of Education*, ed. William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 290-299.

³⁶³ R.I. Sementkovsky, quoted in Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia: the Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 20-21.

³⁶⁴ Lunacharsky’s view was shared by Romain Rolland, of whom he was a great admirer, and also by Lenin.

libraries”) Meyerhold and his colleagues across the spectrum of Left art, from painting to music to poetry, championed the “culture of materials” and the scientific principles of organization on which it was founded.³⁶⁵ The painter, Nikolai Punin, described the essential features of the new culture in 1920:

Organization is the new factor on which the conception of culture is founded. Man is a technological animal, i.e. in this new arrangement of European society, which has not yet come about, but which is in evidence, man must as far as possible economize his energy and must in any event coordinate all his forces with the level of modern technology. The economy of energy and the mechanization of creative forces, these are the conditions that guarantee us the really intensive growth of European culture. The artist cannot avoid these new factors of our world; he must reckon with them.³⁶⁶

From the perspective of theatrical art, new ideas about the organization of materials, economizing energy, and coordinating forces all pointed to the need to reconceive the work of the actor. What appeared obvious to directors of the theatrical Left was that a fundamental reorganization of the actor’s body—the primary material with which the art of theater is concerned—would be necessary in order to bring it into line with the new science of society. What was true for the individual actor in the theater would also be true for the new “mass actor” who would be expected to perform well not only in the new mass pageants, but also in all aspects of the new revolutionary society.

Prosaic Pageantry: Soviet Bodies and the Renovation of the “Mass Actor”

Though they differed in their approaches to the issue, Russian symbolists, futurists and people’s theater advocates—all of whom had begun to develop their ideas in the prerevolutionary

³⁶⁵ Vsevolod Meyerhold, “Inaugural Speech to the Company of the RSFSR Theatre no. 1,” in Edward Braun, ed. and trans. *Meyerhold on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1969), 169. I use the term “left” here interchangeably with the term “futurist,” which in the 1920s was used more often to refer to experimental forms of art in general than to members of specific artistic organizations (see Fitzpatrick, 120). In his note to the title of his article, “Futurism and Proletarian Art,” Natan Altman wrote “I am using ‘futurism’ in its everyday meaning, i.e. all leftist tendencies in art.” Altman, quoted in John E. Bowlt, ed. *Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, Revised and Enlarged Edition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 161.

³⁶⁶ N.N. Punin, “Cycle of Lectures [Extracts],” in Bowlt, 175.

period—shared a belief in the idea of theater as an inherently revolutionary art form, which could be used to transform the lives of workers. This perspective is not too far from that of either Louis Napoleon Parker or Percy MacKaye, creators of *The Sherborne Pageant* and the *Masque of St. Louis* (Chapters Two and Three, respectively) who may well have expressed themselves similarly had they lived through major revolutions in their own nations. Indeed, von Geldern, Clark and Fischer-Lichte all point out in their respective works on mass pageants that while pageant-devisers in Petrograd drew heavily on native performance traditions—including festivals, choirs, allegorical processions, mystery plays, dynastic pageants and military re-enactments—they were also influenced by the continuing success of pageant movements in both England and the United States.³⁶⁷ In particular, the *Masque of St. Louis* (1914) and *Caliban by the Yellow Sands* (1916) by Percy MacKaye, provided inspiration for theater theorist Platon Kerzhentsev’s highly influential 1918 book, *The Creative Theater* (*Tvorcheskii Teatr*) in which he called for pageants that would develop and direct the creative instincts of the masses.

Despite the existence of influential models and well-established traditions, the Petrograd pageant-devisers understood that they would have to reinvent those traditions substantially in light of the radically new circumstances in which they found themselves. The untold horrors of the First World War and the continuing violence of the Civil War confirmed the need for theatrical reforms reflecting the new reality—what Victor Shklovsky called “the hard reality that is real.” As Kerzhentsev put it in 1918, “Only the World War and the onset of international revolution shifted questions [concerning the development of proletarian theater] from a theoretical plane to that of everyday practice.”³⁶⁸ Although the visions of collective liberation

³⁶⁷ Clark, 132.

³⁶⁸ Kerzhentsev, “The Proletarian Theater,” in Rosenberg, 428.

proposed by Wagner and Nietzsche to some extent retained their romantic appeal even after the war, the texture of reality had been irreversibly altered. Eric Hobsbawm's description of the way "invented traditions" began to change in the postwar period usefully summarizes the essential difference between pre-war British and American pageantry, on one hand, and Bolshevik pageants on the other:

In retrospect it would seem that the period which straddles the First World War marks a divide between languages of symbolic discourse. As in military uniforms what might be called the *operatic* mode gave way to the *prosaic* mode. On the stage of public life the emphasis shifted from the design of elaborate stage-sets, to the movement of the actors themselves—either, as in military or royal parades, a ritual minority acting for the benefit of a watching mass public, or a merger of actors and public.³⁶⁹

Although their broad social and cultural aims stemmed from similar crises related to the rise of popular sovereignty and the expansion of mass culture, there is little doubt that clear differences existed between the *operatic* pageants that took place in prewar England and the United States and the *prosaic* pageants of the Russian Civil War, which were later imitated by socialists throughout Europe and the United States.³⁷⁰ Notably, what Civil War pageants produced were not *books*, but *scenarios* (*tsenarii*). Whereas the scenic design of British and American prewar pageants was influenced by the grandeur and historical detail associated with the late nineteenth-century operatic stage, the aesthetics of the new proletarian state demanded the straightforward and unadorned realism associated with the newsreel. Hobsbawm's insight is, in at least one sense, uncannily accurate. Whereas in English and American pageants participants often wore colorful and often elaborate historical costumes, participants playing "the masses" in Bolshevik pageants generally wore drab costumes resembling real workers' or soldiers' uniforms.

³⁶⁹ Hobsbawm, "Mass Producing Traditions," 304-5.

³⁷⁰ The influence of Civil War pageants on British pageantry in the 1930s is mentioned in Wallis, "The Popular Front Pageant: Its Emergence and Decline."

According to the Hungarian journalist, René Fülöp-Miller, who was in the audience for *Commune*, as well as for several earlier pageants, *Commune* was the first pageant to “attempt to pass directly from illusion of dramatic action to reality.”³⁷¹ It used the actual objects of everyday life in Civil War Petrograd to represent historical scenes of working class struggle: real Red Army uniforms and guns, propaganda posters and automobiles. It used music as a real part of the everyday culture depicted (rather than atmospherically or symbolically): the privileged classes dance to a Viennese waltz while revolutionaries bury their dead to Chopin’s “Funeral March.” It was designed to take place in a semi-adapted urban space with a minimum of additional scenographic detail, and to be lit by the floodlights of a minesweeper moored on the Neva. Battles were conducted by real soldiers and sailors firing from real guns and cannons, and it ended with a parade of troops of the Petrograd garrison, accompanied by armored cars and cavalry.

Like the folk realism of the English pageants, the prosaic realism of Civil War pageants was rooted in a collective ideal. Whereas the *Sherborne Pageant*’s attempts to re-make scenes and characters from a mythical pre-industrial past reflected a fully-industrialized society’s widespread perception that its crowds must be trained to become more “natural,” *Commune*’s version of a realist aesthetic stemmed from a “backwards,” still largely rural society’s aspiration to transform its peasantry into a modern, super-productive “proletariat.” As many scholars have acknowledged, the fact that Russia did not possess a properly Marxist proletariat (i.e. urban and industrial) but rather a tradition-bound peasantry was a source of frequent anxiety for Bolshevik leaders.³⁷² In opposition to Soviet-era propaganda that produced what Eric Naiman calls

³⁷¹ Fülöp-Miller, 146.

³⁷² Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society between Revolutions, 1918-1929* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 38-49.

“corporal fantasies [of] a unified, militant proletariat, single-mindedly struggling against fierce class enemies to establish a communist paradise,” the thousands of Red Army soldiers who performed in the pageants of 1920 (including in *Commune*) were for the most part peasant recruits whose enlistment was a matter of survival rather than ideology.³⁷³ On the one hand, peasants had been victims of the tsarist regime and thus a natural ally of the Bolsheviks in overthrowing imperialism. On the other hand, Bolshevik leaders argued that centuries of serfdom had bred in the peasantry a strong attachment to the church and a bourgeois belief in the right of private ownership. The unfixed allegiances of Russia’s peasant masses, especially those who had recently joined the Red Army, presented a serious threat to the defense and progress of socialism, one that Bolsheviks hoped could be overcome by what Daniel Beer has recently described as “renovation”—“a full-scale reinvention of psychological, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and spiritual attitudes” beginning with the regeneration of the Russian body.

In his work on the development of crowd theory and theories of degeneration in Russia, Daniel Beer argues in *Renovating Russia* that “the most basic continuity between late imperial Russian liberalism and early soviet radicalism lies in the assumption that human material could and should be remolded.”³⁷⁴ Despite the fact that the Bolsheviks based their legitimacy on the popular uprising that had brought them to power, they also inherited from the revolutionary *intelligentsia* of the nineteenth century a longstanding belief that the Russian masses were neither willing nor ideal candidates for socialist transformation. Beer convincingly demonstrates that the peasant masses are Russia’s version of Le Bon’s dangerous, primitive and irrational crowds. They are violent and easily roused to anger. They are able to tear down institutions and

³⁷³ Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: the Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 57.

³⁷⁴ Beer, 207.

to destroy property, but never to build. They are prone to hysteria, superstition and deviancy.³⁷⁵

Social scientists and medical experts of the period explained the moral decrepitude and criminal tendencies of the masses in terms of hereditary processes of physical degeneration that had left their mark and grown worse over the course of many centuries.³⁷⁶ According to Beer, the fear that widespread physical and moral degeneration “would undermine any attempt to bring about the modernization of the country” may have been more acute in Russia than elsewhere in Europe.³⁷⁷ Nevertheless, he continues, “no self-respecting *intelligent* held the biopsychological differences between the masses and educated society to be immutable and ineradicable.”³⁷⁸ In fact, as Tricia Starks demonstrates, numerous “health and welfare” programs in the early years of the Bolshevik regime testified to the pervasive belief among Russian socialists that “strong bodies generated balanced minds that would, in turn, choose the most rational, equitable, and inevitable of political, social and economic structures, namely socialism.”³⁷⁹ Bolsheviks optimistically believed that in the course of no more than a few generations the “apathetic, inert, dormant and convention-ridden” peasantry could be transformed into a strong-willed, fully conscious and dynamic proletariat.

For theater artists, the renovation of “human material” and the transformation of the “backwards” masses into a modern proletariat were issues addressed through an ongoing debate about the training and development of the “proletarian” or “mass” actor. Indeed, many in the theatrical Left assumed that, since the Revolution had ushered in a new era in which the actors in

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 132-164.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 9.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 49.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 22.

³⁷⁹ Tricia Starks, *The Body Soviet: Propaganda, Hygiene, and the Revolutionary State* (Madison:University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 4.

the theater would also be workers in the factories and soldiers in the trenches, to prepare actors for performance was equivalent to the task of preparing citizens for labor and or preparing soldiers for active duty. Vladimir Smyshlaiev, a theorist in the Proletkult movement, stated in no uncertain terms that what was required was no less than a “carefully elaborated system of training for the mass actor. The actor must be part of the collective Mass whether in the theatre or out of it.”³⁸⁰ New systems of acting would “release the possibilities of actorship and citizenship lying dormant in him and make a citizen of him.”³⁸¹ By contrast with conventional, bourgeois notions of the actor as one who assumes the psychology of an individual character and whose work consists primarily in delivering the words of a playwright to an audience, Proletkultists argued that “the fundamental quality of a good actor [in the proletarian theater] should be a maximum of flexibility and a minimum of individuality.”³⁸² They were, however, realistic about their prospects of achieving actor training reform in the short term. At the first all-Russian Proletkult Conference in 1918, Kerzhentsev said, “We must recognize that there are still no actors for the proletarian theater; we are only awaiting such actors.”³⁸³

For Left theater artists like Nikolai Petrov, Sergei Radlov, Adrian Piotrovsky and Vladimir Soloviev (four of *Commune*’s five directors), who had studied with Vsevolod Meyerhold and who had at various times been responsible for training actors and directors in Meyerhold’s studios both before and after the October Revolution, the project of renovating the actor was fundamental to the project of revolutionizing theatrical art. For Meyerhold and his collaborators after about 1913, actor training meant instructing performers in how to harmonize

³⁸⁰ V.I. Smyshlaiev, quoted in Huntley Carter, *The New Spirit in the Russian Theatre, 1917-1928* (London: Arno Press, 1970), 36.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Kerzhentsev, “Proletarian Theater,” 431; 428.

³⁸³ Ibid., 428.

their bodies not only with one another, but also with other theatrical “materials”: properties, costumes and set pieces, as well as sound, light, space, text and architecture. Whereas the rhythms and reflexes practiced in Meyerhold’s studio before the revolution reflected the neoclassical influences of Delsarte and Dalcroze, after the revolution they more often reflected Meyerhold’s growing interest in industry and in the science of society. According to the principles of Taylorism, the new actor in Meyerhold’s studio would become “functional” by learning the best and most efficient use of his own individual material (his body) in relation to other functional materials.³⁸⁴ According to the principles of “collective reflexology,” he would learn to develop his individual reflexes, thereby extending his sensory capacities, as well as his “social reflex,” thereby becoming more responsive to the needs of the collective.³⁸⁵

Meyerhold’s ideas about renovating the actor’s body and thereby beginning the process of renovating the social body were less unconventional than they may at first seem; in fact, they closely paralleled Bolshevik theories of individual and collective transformation. Both were grounded in the psycho-physiological theories of Russia’s crowd theorists. The writings of Nikolai Mikhailovsky, Vladimir Sluchevsky, Vladimir Bekhterev, Nikolai Bazhenov and Aron Zalkind in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were explicitly connected with and in some cases anticipated the work of crowd theorists in France and Italy.³⁸⁶ Their books and essays

³⁸⁴ On Taylorism in Russia see Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1988). On Meyerhold’s use of Taylorist ideas see Alma Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia* (New York: McFarland & Co., 1996).

³⁸⁵ On the theory of collective reflexology see Jaan Valsiner, “From Energy to Collectivity: A Commentary on the Development of Bekhterev’s Theoretical Views,” in V.M. Bekhterev, *Collective Reflexology, the Complete Edition*, ed. Lloyd H. Strickland, trans. Eugenia Lockwood and Alisa Lockwood (London: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 1-11. On the influence of Bekhterev’s ideas on the development of Meyerhold’s system of training for actors, see Law and Gordon.

³⁸⁶ On the development of crowd theory in Russia see Lloyd H. Strickland, “Russian and Soviet Social Psychology,” *Canadian Psychology*, vol. 32, no. 4 (October 1991), 580-595, and Daniel Beer, *Renovating Russia*.

critique and borrow from studies by Hippolyte Taine, Gustave Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde and Scipio Sighele. Nevertheless, despite their affinities with other European theorists, Russian contributions to crowd theory had certain indigenous characteristics that, as Gregory Razran explains, “exercised an overriding influence not only on psychology as such but on Russian thought in general.”³⁸⁷

Most important among these was “the reflex doctrine of the psyche” proposed by I.M. Sechenov in “By Whom and How should Psychology be Studied?” (1893).³⁸⁸ Sechenov’s highly influential “physiological psychology” had three essential features that can be found in all later works of Russian crowd theory. The first is a belief in psychophysiological monism—the idea that mind and body are not separate substances, but two aspects of the same reality. The second is that the concept of the “reflex” corresponds both to psychological and physiological reactions, thereby making them synonymous with one another. The third feature is that psychophysiological reactions are themselves reflex in nature, i.e., they are produced by the mechanism of “conditioned reflexes,” which Ivan Pavlov would identify in 1901.

The neurologist and psychiatrist, Vladimir Bekhterev, independently arrived at his theory of “associative reflexes” (synonymous with conditioned reflexes) less than two years after Pavlov. Though he did not, like Pavlov, earn an immediate international reputation, he quickly rose to prominence in his own country as a leading authority on the workings of the individual—and by extension the collective—brain. The authors of a recent article argue that because “Bekhterev approached the question of the relationship between the brain and behavior as an experimental psychologist rather than as a single-purposed physiologist, which Pavlov so

³⁸⁷ Gregory Razran, ““Russian Physiologists’ Psychology and American Experimental Psychology: A Historical and a Systematical Collation and a Look into the Future,” *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 63, no. 1, 44.

³⁸⁸ See Razran, 42-46.

eminently was,” it was Bekhterev who was able to develop his reflex theory into an all-encompassing theory of social behavior, which came to exercise a strong influence on Russian society in the post-revolutionary period.³⁸⁹ Bekhterev’s theory of “collective reflexology” was frequently cited not only by Bolshevik leaders, but also by Meyerhold, who used it to lend scientific support to his experiments in actor training.³⁹⁰

Among Bekhterev’s many unique contributions to Sechenov’s “reflex doctrine of the psyche” was his the idea that, for scientific purposes, human beings are best thought of as “energy-accumulators.”³⁹¹ He argued that all phenomena come about due to changing patterns of energy distribution, and that the psychophysiological reflex is the basic mechanism by which energy is transformed at all levels from the individual to the collective. To the idea that mind and body are but different forms of organized energy, Bekhterev added the idea—in accord with all works of crowd theory—that all general laws applicable to the behavior of individuals are likewise applicable to collectives. Bekhterev’s theory of “associative reflexes” lent support to two fundamentals of Bolshevism: that all forms and expressions of consciousness have an essentially physiological or material basis, and that society is, more or less, an aggregate of many individuals acting on each other.³⁹² As Bekhterev’s influence grew, his theories were soon called upon to support Bolshevik policy. Drawing on Bekhterev’s theories, one Bolshevik criminologist declared, “What is required is a swift and complete adaptation to new environmental conditions,

³⁸⁹ Vladimir Lerner, Jacob Margolin and Eliezer Witztum, “Vladimir Bekhterev: his Life, his Work and the Mystery of his Death,” *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2006), 221.

³⁹⁰ Gordon, 126. Bekhterev’s name appears in the “Program of Studies” written for students in a Meyerhold workshop next to one of the course goals under the subheading “Biomechanics.” According to a source in Gordon and Law, Meyerhold most likely came to know of Bekhterev’s theories in January, 1920 when he attended the First All-Russia conference of the Scientific Organization of Labor (NOT), which was then chaired by Bekhterev.

³⁹¹ V.M. Bekhterev, *Collective Reflexology*, 65.

³⁹² Bekhterev became a vocal social critic at the time of the 1905 revolt. His courage in criticizing the tsar, his explicit condemnations of capitalism and his unswerving support for student protest in the prerevolutionary period made him an ally of the Bolsheviks.

the individuality of the person is suppressed and there are great demands for the development of a social reflex, the individual is sacrificed to the interests of the collective.”³⁹³ The need “to generate a new knowledge” rooted in a collective ideal, would require the development of “a new chain of conditional reflexes.”³⁹⁴ Accordingly, numerous examples of how uncoordinated “crowds” of individuals might become coordinated social groups by conditioning their collective reflexes can be found throughout Bekhterev’s *Collective Reflexology*. Particularly important for Meyerhold’s purposes was Bekhterev’s assertion that:

Discourse is not the only mediator in social-group cohesion. Expressive movements and gestures undoubtedly play a significant role in this respect. By acting directly on a person and by a process of accumulative imitation, the language of gestures may sometimes have greater communicative power than discourse—one can observe this in an excited crowd. It is also beyond any doubt that there are forms of social group cohesion in which action, rather than words functions as a cohesive agent and produces an affective state, as , for example, in the theatre where action often stimulates imitation.³⁹⁵

Combining a belief in the physiological basis of psychology (both individual and collective) with scientific formulae concerning the transference and distribution of energy, Bekhterev’s theory of collective reflexology supported beliefs that Meyerhold had already come around to via his study of theatrical art, but for which he had never before claimed any scientific basis. Given the high value placed on a scientific approach to art in the post-revolutionary period, it is not surprising that he often referred to the work of reflexologists when explaining the value of his early biomechanical experiments as training actors to understand the “laws of the coordination of the body and objects outside of it, of the body and objects in the hands, of the body and the costume

³⁹³ G.N. Udal’tsov, quoted in Beer, 186.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Bekhterev, 137.

clothing it.”³⁹⁶ Moreover, given the affinities between Meyerhold’s proto-biomechanics and Bekhterev’s collective reflexology, it is perhaps not surprising that one of the earliest theatrical images from the Civil War period in which Russian bodies are “conditioned” comes from the 1918 version of Vladimir Mayakovsky’s *Mystery-Bouffe*, an allegorical play about the revolution directed by Meyerhold, which also served as an early model for the Civil War mass pageants.

Early in the play, when the worker heroes of the play (The Unclean) finally succeed in tossing overboard the last of the bourgeoisie (The Clean), the Blacksmith, as the leader of the Unclean, urges his comrades to “Rejoice!” His call is refused; the Unclean reply that their provisions are all gone. They are weak from hunger. The Farmhand (a peasant, of course) is the one to propose the idea that they “become steel” in order not to feel the pain of starvation. One by one, each of the Unclean approaches the Blacksmith’s anvil. Each one presents a part of his body (an arm, a leg, a chest) to be steeled, submitting himself to the blows of the hammer. Now “steeled and strengthened,” the workers have become revolutionary bodies tempered for battle. Despite their hunger they are ready to rise to the defense of the collective at any moment.³⁹⁷ Mayakovsky’s allegory offers an example of reflex conditioning that in some sense can be extended to all the mass pageants, including *Towards a World Commune*, which, as I argue, demonstrates stages in the process of forging a new “Soviet” mass body—the proletariat—from the remnants of an outworn “Russian” body, the peasantry.

Towards a World Commune

Less than two months prior to its scheduled performance date, the Theatre Department of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (TEO) and the PUR (the division of the Red Army responsible

³⁹⁶ Vsevolod Meyerhold, quoted in Gordon, 127.

³⁹⁷ Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Mystery-Bouffe*, trans. Dorian Rottenberg, in *Classic Soviet Plays* (Moskva: Izd-progress, 1979), 136-137.

for “political education”) began to organize a pageant to be performed in honor of the meeting of the Comintern. *Commune*’s five directors—Konstantin Mardzhanov, Nikolai Petrov, Sergei Radlov, Adrian Piotrovsky and Vladimir Soloviev—were given a mere ten days to rehearse a production involving not only four-thousand performers, but also horses, tanks, artillery, sirens, ships and vast quantities of smoke and fireworks. Petrov would be responsible for directing Act One, Radlov for Act Two, Piotrovsky and Soloviev for Act Three, and Mardzhanov would oversee the continuity of the whole. The setting was to be designed by the artist Natan Altman, who had recently re-designed the Kremlin as a futurist garden for the First of May celebrations.³⁹⁸

Although *Commune*’s rehearsal period was shorter than most, none of the Civil War pageants enjoyed the extended rehearsal and production periods characteristic of British and American pageants. Just as the yearlong process that led to the production of the *Sherborne Pageant* served its efforts to re-create the allegedly slower pace of life in preindustrial societies, so too did the fact that *Commune* was organized in less than two months, that it was a joint venture between the army and the theater, and that it was created by a directorial cooperative support its claims to be an authentic form of revolutionary art. These facts attested to commonly-held notions that the revolution would usher in a new era in which divisions between art, politics and industry would be erased, in which citizens would work collaboratively instead of seeking individual achievement, and in which modern values of speed and efficiency would inform all aspects of life.

Although Eric Rosmer and other Comintern delegates believed that Maksim Gorky wrote

³⁹⁸ Andreeva, 419-20.

the pageant, in fact there is no evidence of who committed *Commune's* scenario to paper.³⁹⁹ Like many other kinds of theater after the October Revolution, pageants were *instsenirovki*: performances that, having no script, were “improvised” by adapting and piecing together numerous written and oral texts, images, symbols, musical compositions and even whole scenes from other revolutionary and non-revolutionary works of theater. The plot of *Towards a World Commune*, insofar as it can be reconstructed from the text of the scenario, as well as from firsthand accounts, resembles an intricate triptych. In order to understand all the narrative detail and iconography structured into its three-act story, one would require a thorough understanding of Bolshevism’s prehistory including the particular histories of various international socialist organizations, comprehensive knowledge of socialist heroes and their views, and an awareness of the immediate pressures attending the meeting of the Comintern during the summer of 1920. Notably, such knowledge would have been out of the reach of the majority of the pageant’s spectators and participants. Nevertheless, I include here, act by act, an abridged version of the scenario of *Towards a World Commune*, as translated into English by James von Geldern, in order provide a frame of reference for the maneuvers I discuss in the remainder of this chapter: the entrances, exits and turns of various groups of performers; the appearance of mass symbols such as the Red Flag and the Red Star; and mass gestures of working and marching in unison.⁴⁰⁰

Critical analysis of *Towards a World Commune* has been neglected in part because of its alleged likeness to its immediate predecessor, *The Mystery of Liberated Labor*. In both pageants history figures as a never-ending conflict between the oppressed working masses and the

³⁹⁹ Rosmer, 67. Gorky may in fact have had some influence on the production. His common-law wife, the actress Maria Federovna Andreeva, was at the time the head of the Theater and Spectacle Section of the Northern Commune’s regional division of the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). Andreeva was the one who put Mardzhanov in charge of *Towards a World Commune* and who had the final word on all matters of production.

⁴⁰⁰ James von Geldern, “Towards a World Commune (Scenario),” *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore, 1917-1953* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 30.

tyrannical ruling classes. Both portray the rise of the working classes through a succession of scenes representing revolutionary events drawn from European history. In both, the “apotheosis” of the working classes is the 1917 October Revolution. Like *Labor*, *Commune* was performed at the site of the former Stock Exchange building. In both pageants directors used the upper and lower portions of the Stock Exchange staircase to scenographically articulate the distance between the working and the ruling classes, and used the portals of the building as a kind of proscenium frame. Many of the spectators of *Commune* must also have been present for *Labor*.

Despite the numerous similarities between the two pageants, however, a brief comparison of the first lines of their scenarios helps to illuminate a transition from the aesthetic/operatic to the prosaic/cinematic mode of mass performance. The first few sentences of the scenario of *The Mystery of Liberated Labor* evoke a Wagnerian portrait of oppression rooted in myth and folklore:

From behind a blank wall come strains of enchanting music and a nimbus of bright, festive light. The wall hides the wondrous world of the new life. There liberty, brotherhood and equality reign. But the approach to the magical castle of freedom is guarded by threatening cannons. Slaves on the steps are weighed down by incessant hard labor.⁴⁰¹

The pageant’s collective protagonist—“slaves” of no particular time or place—can easily be interpreted as an allegory of spiritual oppression rather than as a realistic representation of the historical working masses. The emphasis on “enchanting music” signifies the pageant’s debt to Wagner as well as to the operatic pageants of the prewar era, and its descriptions of scenic elements such as the “magical castle” allude to symbolist aesthetics.

Although *Commune*’s opening scene has commonly been described as “essentially the same” as *Labor*’s, the first sentences of its scenario offer a distinctly more prosaic version of the same story:

⁴⁰¹ Fülöp-Miller, 143.

The kings and bankers who rule the world erect a monument to their own power, the power of capital, with workers' hands. Above, the bourgeoisie's sumptuous celebration; below, worker's forced labor. The laboring masses produce a group of leaders, founders of the First International. The Communist Manifesto.⁴⁰²

Commune's scenario defines its protagonist as the workers of the world. Defining them by their class rather than their condition, it emphasizes the workers' capacity for action rather than their suffering. If *Labor's* scenario, with its reliance on allegory and Wagnerian themes, indicates an operatic sensibility, *Commune's* scenario can accurately be called prosaic, asserting its status as a documentary text and narrowing its narrative scope to focus only on moments of actual historical significance to the international socialist movement. Short, muscular sentences explain the action and organization of the scene, clearly describe the conflict along class lines, and define the historical moment: the appearance of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Beginning in 1848 and ending with scenes representing battles on the Polish front that had taken place only days before the pageant was performed, *Commune* concentrates on a mere seventy-two year period (by comparison with *Labor's* two-thousand year span) much of which would have still been available to the living memory of performers and spectators in 1920. Throughout the pageant the narrative remains tied to documents, institutions and historical figures whose images and words were at least potentially available and accessible to its spectators.

Act One: From Toiling Masses to Revolutionary Crowd

The events represented in Act One of *Towards a World Commune* begin at a moment just prior to the appearance of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848 and end with the failure of the Paris Commune in 1871. In *Commune's* narrative, this historical period represents the adolescence of the revolutionary crowd—its growing awareness of oppression, its first attempts at rebellion and its false sense of invincibility. As an argument about the relationship of theatrical revolution to

⁴⁰² von Geldern, "Towards a World Commune (Scenario)," 30.

social and political revolution, *Commune*'s first act performatively demonstrates that drastic and sudden re-organizations of the spaces of performance can inspire extraordinary developments collective consciousness and collective movement. It stages a transformation of the dormant *trudiashchiesia*—a term often translated into English as the *toiling masses* or simply *toilers*—into a “revolutionary crowd.”

Having studied directing with Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko at the Moscow Art Theatre before the Revolution, Nikolai Petrov, director of Act One of *Towards a World Commune*, was well-schooled in the tradition of European stage naturalism. In the decade before *Commune*, he had also at various times been a junior colleague of both Nikolai Evreinov and of Meyerhold. Nevertheless, Petrov's work as a director was distinct from all three of his mentors. Like other Left artists who saw “the old [theatre] rotting in its respectable routine, having lost all its freshness and vitality,” Petrov aimed more directly at “unpolished realism” than either Evreinov or Meyerhold. Prior to *Commune*, his direction of Lunacharsky's *Faust and the City* had gained praise for its gritty and realistic portrayal of urban life.⁴⁰³ After *Commune*, he went on to direct part of *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, and in 1925 his production of Lunacharsky's *Poison*, featuring prostitutes and cocaine addicts, gained great acclaim, representing for one reviewer, “a leap from the clouds of history to the land of reality.”⁴⁰⁴ Both the erasure of the “old theatre” and the leap into reality are demonstrated in Petrov's staging of *Commune*'s first act.

Scene 1: The Communist Manifesto

The kings and bankers who rule the world erect a monument to their own power, the power of capital, with workers' hands. Above, the bourgeoisie's sumptuous celebration; below, worker's forced labor. The laboring masses produce a group of leaders, founders of the First International. The Communist Manifesto. Clearly visible are the words “Workers have nothing to lose but their chains, but they

⁴⁰³ Deák, 14.

⁴⁰⁴ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre: Tradition and the Avant-Garde* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 91.

have the whole world to win.” “Workers of the World unite!” Only a small group of French workers answer the call to battle. They fling themselves into an attack on the capitalist stronghold. The forward ranks are met by shots and fall. The commune’s red banner flies. The bourgeoisie flees. Workers seize its throne and destroy the monument to bourgeois power. The Paris Commune.

Scene 2: The Paris Commune and the Death of the First International

The Communards celebrate a merry holiday. Workers dance the carmagnole, a dance created by the Great French Revolution. The Paris Commune decrees the foundations of a socialist order. New danger. The bourgeoisie gathers strength and sends the legions of Prussia and Versailles against the first Proletarian Commune. The Communards build barricades, defend themselves bravely, and perish in unequal battle, never aided by the workers of other nations still unconscious of their class interests. The victors shoot the Communards. Workers remove their fallen comrades’ bodies and hide the trampled Red Banner for future battles. Women weep over the dead. The funereal black curtain of reaction envelops the fragments of the Paris Commune.

The first maneuver away from what one might call, along with Hobsbawm, an operative (traditional, conventional) mode of invented tradition and towards a more prosaic (modern, revolutionary) mode occurred in the very first moment of the performance, which employed two different kinds of heralds. The first, in which “heralds entered on white horses and announced the beginning via a fanfare of trumpets,” followed centuries of tradition. Recalling the dynastic pageants of the recent regime, the heralds lent a sense of authority and solemnity to the occasion and, in calling them to attention, identified spectators as subjects of both the imperial state and the Orthodox Church. A second “fanfare” proposed an entirely different possibility. After a battleship positioned in the Neva fired off a four-cannon salvo, spotlights hit the upper platform of the Stock Exchange, focusing on a broad banner on which was written the famous final sentences of *The Communist Manifesto*: “Workers of the World Unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!”⁴⁰⁵ In this moment, the October Revolution—in which battleships played a central mythological role—figured as the logical and direct outcome of Marx’s call to action, as well as the instigating event that allows the words of the *Manifesto* to become visible to its

⁴⁰⁵ Rosmer, 67.

intended audience. Functioning as a kind of inter-title, the spot-lit text simultaneously distilled the story to follow and verified its authenticity, addressing all spectators as “the workers of the world.” The movement from the former fanfare to the latter provides an initial sense of how *Commune* challenged its spectators to rapidly transform themselves from imperial into proletarian subjects, how it urged them to imagine themselves as a collective actor, and how it incorporated traditional performance practices in order to, on the one hand, establish a sense of a shared past with spectators, and on the other hand, to stage the erasure of such practices, thereby making room for the development of a modern, revolutionary mass subject.

Occupation and Crucession

Commune began, deceptively, like so many plays of the conventional stage. Entering from the “wings” created by the portals of the Stock Exchange, an actor playing a King entered into a spotlight focused on an enormous throne occupying the center of *Commune*’s vast stage. Two sets of columns on either side of this recessed space created the effect of a proscenium stage reserved exclusively for the King and for the courtiers, bankers, industrialists, and other fashionable men and women who soon entered and gathered around him. As the King and his entourage began to dance to a Viennese waltz, police and army units enter, forming what will become an increasingly menacing barrier between the oppressors and the oppressed. Like the heralds of the prologue, the conventional entrance of the King and his entourage sets the stage for a second, more spectacular and unsettling entrance, that of the peasant masses who are regularly referred to in Russian reviews of *Commune* as *trudiashchiesia*—“toilers” or “toiling masses.”

Although many of the words used to describe collectivities can be usefully understood across linguistic and cultural lines, words like *trudiashchiesia* prove somewhat more difficult to

translate. Rendered most often into English as “toiling masses” or simply “toilers,” *trudiashchiesia* combines the meanings of *narod* (people), *krestianii* (peasants) and *rabotii* (workers), while not being specifically synonymous with any of these.⁴⁰⁶ What most defines the *trudiashchiesia* is its suffering and its servitude. In painting, the idea of the “toiling masses” is represented in Ilya Repin’s *Barge-haulers on the Volga*, and in performance it is recognizable in a procession of workers with bent backs in *Storming of the Winter Palace* (figures 36 and 37). The word expresses a set of circumstances into which one is born and therefore encompasses a sense of predestination that the somewhat more neutral “workers” and “masses” do not share. While this sense of predestination presents obvious problems in a Marxist-Leninist context, an even greater problem lies in the significant distance between the unconscious condition of oppression in which the *trudiashchiesia* exist—its “herd mentality”—and the conscious awareness of class struggle that characterizes an authentic, revolutionary proletariat. Put simply, the *trudiashchiesia* embodies the “backwards masses” to which Lenin repeatedly refers in “*Left-Wing*” *Communism*. It represents a working class that has yet to gain consciousness of itself as such.

Unlike the ruling class and its cronies, the *trudiashchiesia* do not enter from behind a masked part of the stage into a fully lit space defined by a proscenium frame. Instead, hundreds of performers representing the “enslaved and toiling masses streamed out of the darkness [from the streets] on either side of the building” carrying hammers and pickaxes, and slowly filled the square in front of the Stock Exchange, positioning themselves between the spectators and the

⁴⁰⁶ See Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: the Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 108; and Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 64.

oppressors.⁴⁰⁷ The grand entrance made by the *trudiashchiesia* depended for its effect on the political significance and geographical location of the theatrical site. Located at the tip of Vasilievsky Island, the Stock Exchange Building stood (and still stands) at the point where the river Neva splits into two branches before reaching the sea (figures 38 and 39). With its wide bridges and expansive views on both sides it allowed for the entrance of the *trudiashchiesia* to enact two occupations at once: the occupation of a site of economic privilege by the working classes and the occupation of urban space by a new form of mass theater fusing religious tradition with avant-garde performance techniques.

As Fischer-Lichte points out, the fact that spectators of mass pageants often did not share the patrician backgrounds of pageant creators did not mean that soldiers, workers and peasants in the audience could not imaginatively participate in the performance.⁴⁰⁸ This is especially true since pageant-devisers carefully integrated into their pageants movement patterns that were firmly located within Russian tradition. Such was the case with *Commune's* symbolic crucession, the first of several religious and secular rituals that appear in the pageant. The toilers' entrance traced a path that resembles a *krestnyi khod*, part of a feast day liturgical service in which worshippers take part in a crucession that winds around the outside of a chapel or other church building and then come to a stop on its front steps where the next part of the service occurs (figures 40 and 41). The theatrical crucession performed by the *trudiashchiesia* figures the Stock Exchange Building as a "temple" of capital and prefigures the revolution that is soon to take place on its staircase as a sacred rite. In doing so the moment represents the transgression of several boundaries: between real and theatrical space, between theater and religion, between workers and performers and between performers and spectators, who now occupy the same

⁴⁰⁷ Nikulin, 63.

⁴⁰⁸ Fischer-Lichte, 43.

ground. Although the proscenium frame has not yet been breached since there is still a clear division between actors and spectators, its border has shifted significantly. The toilers who once occupied the background have moved into the foreground, and the distance between the collective body of performers and the collective body of spectators is now slight. The transformation of the space sets the stage for the emergence of the “revolutionary crowd.”

Operatic Gesture and Symbolic Erasure

The competing choreographies of the next scene operate according to a technique common among Left theater artists, which would later become formalized by Sergei Eisenstein in his description of “intellectual montage” in the cinema.⁴⁰⁹ When two scenes with deliberately conflicting styles are staged simultaneously, a new meaning arises out of the juxtaposition. Taking their place in the square, the *trudiashchiesia* begin to perform a “pantomime of daily work.”⁴¹⁰ Their fetters ring in harmony with the light, quick, and traveling rhythms of the Viennese waltz, a popular dance for couples performed both for their own pleasure and for the entertainment of the court. Staged in the narrowly framed center of the theatrical space, between the portals of the Stock Exchange on the uppermost part of the staircase, the waltz performed by the King and his retinue invites spectators to participate only as voyeurs. The performance of the slow and heavy toilers’ pantomime in the square just below the staircase exposes the waltz above as a performance of bourgeois decadence that is sustained through the exploitation of labor.

Whereas the shape of the toilers’ path upon entering the theatrical space derives from Russian religious tradition, the “stylized almost balletic quality of tragic suffering” with which the masses mime their labor once they occupy the square also recalls the gestures of the Russian

⁴⁰⁹ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), 82-83.

⁴¹⁰ Black, quoted in Russell.

operatic stage.⁴¹¹ The image is familiar from the opening of *The Mystery of Liberated Labor*. The combination of traditional, religious and operatic performance elements results in a representation of the *trudiashchiesia* that on the one hand emphasizes the nobility of its suffering and its capacity for collective labor. On the other hand, however, this representation is essentially static and pictorial, rendering the *trudiashchiesia* as passive subjects of oppression. The scene is similar to that which begins Act Two of *The Masque of St. Louis* (Chapter Three) when the allegorical Pioneers enter for the first time, complaining of being lost and leaderless. Like the Pioneers of Percy MacKaye's *Masque, Commune's* toiling masses require something external to make them move, something that will give them a common purpose, provide them with a sense of direction and prompt them to action.

While the imperialist waltz and worker's pantomime continue, a "monument to the power of capital," created by workers hands for the pleasure of their oppressors slowly begins to rise above the King's throne. Resembling both the sun and an enormous golden coin, the yellow disc designed by Natan Altman reiterates *Commune's* particular version of the external enemy: the merger of empire and capital. The raising of this "monument" constitutes a performance of labor similar to the raising and hewing of the cross that appears in the British *Sherborne Pageant* of 1905 (discussed in Chapter Two). In this case, however, the labor performed is involuntary and the monument is a product of oppression, not communal piety. Moreover, in *Commune* the raising of the monument begins to produce a kinetic transformation of the entire theatrical environment that then motivates the transformation of the *trudiashchiesia*.

As the disc mounts higher and higher, there is increasing unrest in the square. One person in the crowd raises a white sheet of paper, which then travels to the corner of the staircase where a small group of workers shout the words of the *Communist Manifesto*: "The proletarians have

⁴¹¹ Belenson, "Vokhrug dvukh mirov."

nothing to lose but their chains. They have the world to win. Workingmen of all countries, unite!” The static portrait of the *trudiashchiesia* begins to come unglued at the moment of the appearance of the *Manifesto*. As the shouted words of the *Manifesto* draw attention to the periphery of the theatrical space, the recessed space between the portals of the Stock Exchange begins to lose its status as the dominant, stable focal point of the performance.

This de-centering introduces a sense of disorder in the dynamics of the stage composition. The movement from proscenium stage play to environmental theater performance that begins with the first entrance of the *trudiashchiesia* becomes increasingly more complex in this scene as multiple sites of performance within the vast theatrical space are activated. The broadening of spectators’ visual and sensorial field corresponds metaphorically to the first stirrings of the *trudiashchiesia*’s social and political consciousness. The immobile, fixed *trudiashchiesia* begin to transform into a mobile and dynamic, if still somewhat disparate crowd. Revolution, suggests *Commune*’s choreography, can emerge from anywhere. All at once, it is no longer precisely clear from where the next collective action will come. This sense of disorder will be necessary in order for the *trudiashchiesia* to begin to cast off the old mass gestures that define them (pantomimes of repetitive labor) and to begin to transform into a “revolutionary crowd.”

On the one hand, a predominantly pathological conception of the revolutionary crowd—as irrational, bloodthirsty, anarchic and regressive—marked the work of many nineteenth and twentieth century crowd theorists, most notably Hippolyte Taine, for whom the crowds of the French Revolution were the paradigmatic example. However, an opposing tradition, at the head of which stands the nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet—saw the revolutionary crowd in its progressive aspect—as “the whole people” awakening to its collective, self-conscious destiny.

For Taine, revolutionary crowds must be brought to order if democratic principles are to be upheld. For Michelet revolutionary crowds are the only collective bodies capable of making authentic claims of popular sovereignty.⁴¹² Similar to the way in which *Commune*'s two prologues and two "first" entrances establish a sense of convention in order to overturn the convention, *Commune*'s stages a familiar image of physical and political stagnation (the *trudiashchiesia*) precisely in order to enact its erasure, thereby making room for the development of the revolutionary crowd.

In *Commune*, as in most instances of early twentieth-century socialist performance, class consciousness and solidarity are crystallized in the symbol of the Red Flag. At the same moment the yellow disc reaches its apex, the Flag appears among crowds of workers shouting slogans in the square below. It is passed from one hand to another through the crowd of workers, but is not accepted anywhere until it reaches a small group of Frenchmen, the Communards of 1871 Paris. The appearance of the Red Flag is crucial moment in *Commune* for it sets in motion two corresponding processes. First, it initiates a rapid and sudden change in the mode of performance, shifting all at once from generalized historical *tableaux* to a kind of documentary re-enactment of the events of the Paris Commune of 1871. Bearing the Red Flag, the Communards rush up the staircase. As imperial police push back one wave of revolutionaries, another rises to take its place. Eventually, the Communards seize the throne, tear down the golden disc and quickly hoist the Red Flag in its place. To the extent that the appearance of the Red Flag triggers a change in the mode of performance, it also signals an important transformation in the shape and meaning of the collective body. Liberated from the pantomime of forced labor, the tragic beauty of the slow and stately *trudiashchiesia* is suddenly replaced by the rapid battle maneuvers of the "revolutionary crowd."

⁴¹² See McClelland, 94-98.

On the spot where the bourgeoisie performed the Viennese Waltz at the beginning of Act One, the revolutionaries now perform the Carmagnole, a collective, public dance of the French Revolution. Although this celebratory scene seems to momentarily unite the spectators and performers of *Towards a World Commune*, the feeling of festivity proves premature. From opposite corners of the staircase, French and Prussian troops run down on a diagonal, breaking up the dancing crowds. They form units at the bottom of the staircase and on both its sides. Although the Communards attempt to defend themselves by building barricades, they find themselves surrounded and outnumbered. The two armies join in storming the stairs, capturing the leaders of the revolution, and eliminating them all in a single firing line. A mass funeral modeled on the “Red funerals” of the day ends Act One.

With respect to the Bolshevik position in July 1920, the final episode of Act One is significant. Though many were already celebrating Bolshevik victory in the Civil War, the party’s leaders were united in their conviction that military power would not be enough to secure long term victory. So long as Russia’s economic and social infrastructure remained crippled, the threat to Bolshevik authority would remain.⁴¹³ *Commune* suggests that although public celebrations may serve to strengthen a sense of collective purpose amongst the revolutionary masses, an excess of festivity can dull vital survival instincts, blinding the masses to impending threats that might emerge from anywhere. Just as the enemy can unexpectedly change its tactics and its position (moving diagonally through the crowd rather than attacking from the front) the success of the Revolution will depend on strategic zig-zagging and the element of surprise. Although the revolution fails to take hold by the end of Act One, it has held its first rehearsal. The collective reflexes necessary to achieving revolution have begun to develop in the mass

⁴¹³ In 1920, Russia’s economy was in an unprecedented state of collapse. By 1921, the total value of the output of finished products in 1921 was only 16 percent of what it had been in 1913. “National income in 1920 was only 40 percent of 1913; agriculture fell by 150%, transport by 500%, and industry by 550%” (Mawdsley, 288).

body and can no longer be entirely suppressed.

Act Two: Puppets, Flags and Collective Bodily Presence

Unlike Act One, in which a single revolutionary group (the Communards) succeeds but is soon defeated, Act Two concerns the expansion of the international socialist movement over the course of forty-three years, from the end of the Paris Commune in 1871 to the beginning of the First World War. No single historical event predominates. Rather, different historical episodes are symbolically linked to one another via a “puppet show” and an enormous game of flags. Although Act Two contains a strong element of play, its games have serious consequences. It incorporates scenes of dead and wounded soldiers, as well as scenes depicting the assassination of the French socialist leader, Jean Jaurès, and the execution of the German socialist leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Whereas the primary questions of Act One are “Where does revolution come from?” and “How does revolution begin?,” the primary concern of Act Two is “How can collective revolutionary identity be strengthened and sustained?” Act One demonstrates how the *trudiashchiesia* becomes a revolutionary crowd, while Act Two demonstrates how the collective bodily presence of the revolutionary masses is generated and amplified.

As directed by Sergei Radlov the second act of *Towards a World Commune* is more *igrishche* (dramatic game) than *teatr*, a term wholly consistent with Radlov’s work as a director prior to his involvement with mass pageants. Before 1917 Radlov had been a student of Meyerhold’s, assisting him in his experiments with *commedia dell’arte* and co-writing with him in 1913 the scenario for a never-produced mass spectacle called *Fire*, which was grounded entirely in principles of *commedia* performance. After the revolution, Radlov began to work almost exclusively on agitational plays, both with the Red Army Studio and with the Theater of

Popular Comedy, which used techniques of fairground theatre to convey its messages. He strongly believed that the new theater would evolve from what were essentially large-scale improvisational games, structured by themes and conventions drawn from a common popular repertory (as in traditional *commedia* performance): “Easily mounted, with new actors experienced in pantomime and verbal improvisation, freed from an overload of psychologism, with a repertory and acting techniques close to the popular understanding, the new theater will revive collective theatrical creation.”⁴¹⁴

Fortunately for Radlov, whose interest in theatrical games had little to do with politics, Bolshevik cultural leaders generally shared his view of the value of games as exercises in collective action. Yet there are telling differences. In a speech delivered to the Fifth Komsomol Congress in 1922, Nikolai Bukharin, editor of *Pravda* and influential leader in the Moscow Soviet, summarized the Bolshevik view:

All possible games and other things distinguished by the competitive principle are to be used for intellectual and physical training. Any game is to some extent a rehearsal for current actions and is a preparation, a training of the hand and mind. We must conduct various contests in the quickness of problem solving, all kinds of football competitions, etc. The fact is that very often the bourgeoisie shows great flexibility, while we lag behind, since, because of our centralized bureaucracy, we cannot make a turn.⁴¹⁵

Whereas Radlov emphasizes improvisation, experience and freedom as principles of collective theatrical creation, Bukharin emphasizes competition, training and quick problem solving as a means to achieving the kind of decentralized action and flexibility seen as vital to the survival of the revolution. As different as these views may seem, they are not incompatible. For both Radlov and Bukharin, games are valuable for connecting minds to bodies and for creating the conditions in which individuals learn to act in concert for the benefit of the collective. Act Two joins

⁴¹⁴ Sergei Radlov, *Stat'i o teatre*. Petrograd: Mysl', 1923, 18.

⁴¹⁵ Nikolai Bukharin, “Bringing Up the Young Generation,” in Rosenberg, *Bolshevik Visions*, 60.

Radlov's concept of games as structured improvisations through which the people create themselves to Bukharin's concept of games as training exercises through which a revolutionary collective body increases its strength and flexibility.

Part II: The Second International

The Reaction. The bourgeoisie triumphantly celebrates its victory. Below reigns the forced labor of workers. Above, the leaders of the Second International, socialist compromisers, noses buried in books and newspapers. Nineteen-fourteen and the call to war. The bourgeoisie shouts: "Hurrah for the war. Death to the enemy." The working masses murmur: "We don't want blood." Their indignation grows. Again the red banner flies. Workers pass the banner from hand to hand and try to present it to the Second International leaders. "You are our leaders. Lead us!" shout the masses. The pseudo-leaders scatter in confusion. Gendarmes, the bodyguards of the bourgeoisie, exult and tear the hated Red Banner apart. The horror and moans of workers.

The prophetic words of the people's leader break the funeral silence: "As the banner has been rent asunder, so shall workers' and peasants' bodies be torn by war. Down with war!" A traitorous shot strikes the tribune. Triumphant imperialists propose voting for war credits. The Second International leaders raise their hands after a moment's hesitation, grab their national flags, and split the once unified masses of the world. Gendarmes lead workers away in different directions. The shameful end of the Second International and the beginning of fratricidal world war.⁴¹⁶

The opening moment of Act Two repeats the first image of Act One: the rulers of nations dance at the top of the Exchange staircase while the toiling masses work in the square below. Yet there are important differences. A photograph from a rehearsal of *Commune* shows the King on his throne in Act Two (figure 42). He is no longer played by a live actor, but by a puppet, or more specifically, by a life-sized effigy. By contrast, the toilers, as in Act One, are played by live actors, most of them Red Army conscripts, workers and students. Whereas Act One limited the complexity of the conflict to two opposing parties—sovereigns and toilers—in Act Two a third group occupies the middle level of the staircase. Sporting "big, bold, papier-mâché heads," and toting enormous papier-mâché books and newspapers, these are the members of the Second

⁴¹⁶ The scenario shows the leaders of the Second International exiting some time after the words "Down with war!" are spoken. All first-hand accounts of the performance suggest that the speech marked the end of Act Two.

International, also called the “Yellow International” by Bolsheviks on account of its alleged cowardice. As masked “half-effigies,” who position themselves halfway between the toilers and the sovereigns their allegiance is uncertain; it is not clear whether they intend to lead the toilers in revolt or to prevent them from revolting.

In order to understand the social meanings of the “puppet show” orchestrated in Act Two of *Towards a World Commune*, it is useful to remember that puppets shows had been a mainstay of Russian fairground entertainment for centuries. In the post-revolutionary period, they continued to be performed during Bolshevik festivals but were, unsurprisingly, altered to foreground revolutionary themes. Whereas the portable marionettes of the traditional puppet stage were created for the entertainment of festival participants, the many life-sized (or larger) figures seen during Bolshevik festivals were designed as counter-revolutionary effigies to be desecrated. In his description of the First of May as the “birthday” of “Bolshevik collective man” Rene Fülöp-Miller explains, by way of condemnation, the role of effigies in the creation of revolutionary collective identity:

In the middle of [Red] Square stand toys of various kinds, his [collective man’s] birthday presents, gigantic dolls made of papier-mâché. Excited and delighted, the collective man stumps about with his thousand legs and shouts “Hurrah! hurrah!” from his thousand throats. Sometimes he stops suddenly, looks round, considers one by one the enormous figures made of cardboard or cloth stuffed with straw; all at once he notices that the dolls have the faces of foreign statesmen and capitalists, that is to say the people against whom he has a grudge at the moment. In a mad rage, he hurls himself against them, furiously tears out their stuffing, holds them in his many outstretched hands, and gloats in the intoxication of victory. Often the figures are hanged on a rope; the raging “mass” sticks a long tongue of red ribbon in their mouths, or burns them ceremoniously.⁴¹⁷

For Fülöp-Miller, the violence directed by ordinary citizens towards effigies of the powerful are evidence of the Bolsheviks’ naïve attempts to bypass the Marxian idea of gradual social evolution and instead to instantaneously and artificially create “the corporeal collective man . . .

⁴¹⁷ Fülöp-Miller, 3.

a new and vital being, an infallible material, physical manifestation of the conception” of collectivism. This “collective man” is, as he says, a “many-membered monster” whose “collective presence becomes corporeally manifest” only when enraged. Of course, what Fülöp-Miller sees as a disturbing feature of Bolshevik festivals is precisely what pageant-devisers hoped to realize in their mass dramas: the emergence of revolutionary collectives capable of acting as a single, unified body to defeat all enemies.

By attacking counterfeit figures of the enemy in a demonstration, a revolutionary collective identity comes into being and begins to assert its corporeality; it begins to accumulate a collective physical presence that translates into political power. Although *Commune*—because it is a civic pageant and not a revolutionary festival or demonstration—does not permit the violent destruction of effigies to take place, its use of effigies and masks arranges what might be described as a “hierarchy of collective bodily presence,” which stands for a hierarchy of authentic revolutionary consciousness. The King in Act Two is merely an insubstantial paper construction almost waiting to be burned or hanged. As a King he can possess no form of class consciousness; thus he manifests no actual bodily presence. That the members of the Second International are played by live performers wearing dummy heads is a sign of their false consciousness, a result perhaps of the fact that their heads are separated from their bodies. Their giant paper heads, like the giant paper books and newspapers in which their giant paper noses are buried, are, *Commune* argues, full of purely theoretical notions about socialism that have little bearing on the actual lives of the masses. By contrast with both the complete effigy of the tsar, and the half-effigies of the members of the Second International, the toilers are represented as their “real” selves, an interpretation further justified by the fact that more than a few of the performers would likely have participated in the real events portrayed. Their real, collective

bodily presence thus automatically serves as an indicator of the authenticity of their revolutionary consciousness.

The collective presence of the revolutionary mass body becomes apparent in Act Two not only by contrast with the surrounding puppets, but also via the symbol of the Red Flag and its movement from hand to hand across the mass of toilers in the square. *Commune*'s toiling masses try over and over again to persuade the leaders of the Second International to take up the Red Flag but are refused. Each time it reaches them, they push it back into the hands of the toilers in the Square. Over the course of the act, the Second International disintegrates into nationalist factions. Its members take up flags of various countries and begin singing overlapping, dissonant versions of national anthems that drown out the pleas of the toilers. The end result is world war.

The Red Flag at the center of the action in Act Two is an important theatrical and dramaturgical device; it provides a visual point of focus for spectators to follow, and also creates a sense of narrative continuity between Acts One and Two, as well as between the disparate events of Act Two. Moreover, like the "Red Funeral" that ends Act One, the symbolic value of Act Two's "pass-the-flag" game would almost certainly have been recognizable to spectators. Red flags were, indisputably, the most potent icon of the international socialist revolution. In the context of Bolshevik mythology, the flag-game therefore represents the failure of the Second International to act on behalf of the working classes to prevent the outbreak of the Great War. It also anachronistically recalls a moment from the 1848 founding of the Second French Republic when the writer and politician Alphonse de Lamartine rejected a plea from the citizens of Paris to institute the Red Flag (rather than the *tricolore*) as the symbol of the new state (figure 43).

More importantly, however, the Red Flag in post-revolutionary Russia was an enduring symbol of the revolutionary body. An instance of this can be seen in Sergei Eisenstein's film

October: Ten Days that Shook the World (1927). In one of many disturbing scenes, a group of bourgeois men and women punch and kick a young Bolshevik man who happens to pass by them. They tear his clothes from his body, expose his flesh and stab him with the butts of their parasols. The scene is intercut with shots of another group of bourgeois ladies (looking more like a coven of witches) tearing an enormous red flag to pieces with their hands, their feet and even with their teeth.⁴¹⁸ The juxtaposition would have been well understood by audiences of *October*; flags representing revolutionary sacrifice were a common feature not only of mass pageants, one of the primary influences for Eisenstein's film, but of many different kinds of civic spectacles including demonstrations and funerals.

The Red Flag represented at the beginning of *Commune*'s second act was in some sense an even more highly-charged symbol because, having been carried from Act One into Act Two, it also represented the last flag to fly over the Paris Commune. The special significance of this in Bolshevik mythology may be seen in the fact that a red flag from the last days of the actual Paris Commune was presented as a "holy relic" with which to drape Lenin's coffin in 1924. Thus, when the flag of the Paris Commune is trampled at the conclusion of Act One it figuratively incorporates the bodies of the dead Communards into its history. When it reappears in Act Two, it has therefore already come to represent the collective body of all those martyred in the cause of socialist revolution. Given the abundant use of red flags in Bolshevik civic rituals, it is likely that spectators would have understood its symbolic, if not precisely its historical meaning. Nevertheless, to be sure that its meaning would be clear, a performer playing Karl Liebknecht ends Act Two by picking up the pieces of the Red Flag tossed aside by the leaders of the second International and crying out: "Just as they tore the Red flag to pieces, they will tear the bodies of

⁴¹⁸ *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*, directed by Sergei Eisenstein (Corinth Films, 1990), DVD, 16.27-17.30.

the workers and peasants in war! Down with war!”

To understand how the flag-game amplifies the collective bodily presence of the revolutionary masses, Viktor Shklovsky’s eccentric definition of “collective creativity” proves useful. Drawing on a metaphor of Brownian motion, he describes how the otherwise undetectable movement of water molecules becomes visible when minute dust particles are thrown into a glass of seemingly still water. Similarly, he argues, it is not necessary to externally impose “collective creativity”; collectivity of any kind (whether in science, art, or politics) always exists and is always in motion, even if that motion seems to be invisible. It only requires some person or some thing to make its movement visible—like dust in water.⁴¹⁹

Adapted only slightly, Shklovsky’s metaphor helps to clarify the symbolic work of *Commune*’s flag-game. As the dominant symbol of the international socialist movement, the Red Flag represents the solidarity of workers of all nations and their collective claim to the right of self-government. Similar to the way in which white stars in the *Masque of St. Louis* awaken a specifically “American” collective consciousness among their receivers, the passage of the Red Flag from hand to hand across the Stock Exchange square represents a growing awareness and expansion of collective revolutionary consciousness. The movement of the flag reveals the existence of a collective revolutionary body by allowing its members to recognize their common condition and their shared claim. It also mobilizes the strength of the collective, distributing power among its many individual members. Although *Commune*’s spectators did not directly take part in this game, they may have been able to project themselves into it, imagining themselves as part of the collective whose narrative was being enacted: in this case, the story of those who opposed the war.

If, from the perspective of choreography, the *trudiashchiesia* of *Commune*’s Act One

⁴¹⁹ Shklovsky, 43.

exhibit an excess of form paired with a lack of energy, the revolutionary masses of Act Two manifest revolutionary energies in search of a stable form. On the one hand, Act Two, as directed by Radlov, suggests that collective revolutionary bodies need not be defined by their success in achieving revolutionary goals. Their embodied consciousness alone constitutes the basis of collective identity. Nevertheless, what collective revolutionary bodies need to succeed, according to the logic of *Commune*'s third and final act, is not only greater consciousness, strength and flexibility but, most importantly, a greater sense of order and organization.

Act Three and Apotheosis: Organizing the Body of the Proletariat

Scene 1: World War

The first battle. The enthroned tsarist government of Russia herds long rows of bleak greatcoats to war. Wailing women try to hold departing soldiers back. Workers, exhausted by starvation and excessive labor, join the women's protest. Wounded are brought back from the front, and invalids crippled by war pass by. The workers' patience is over. Revolution begins. Automobiles, bristling with bayonets, charge by flying red banners. The crowd, swept away by revolutionary wrath, topples the tsar, then stops dead in amazement. Before the crowd stand the new lords: the ministers of the Provisional Government of appeasers. They call for a continuation of the war "to a victorious conclusion" and send the workers into attack. Workers launch another courageous blow supported by an unstoppable stream of soldiers returning from the front, and sweep the appeaser government away. Above the victorious proletariat flares the Second Commune's red banner with emblems of the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic, the hammer and sickle and slogans from the Declaration of Workers' Rights: "All power to the Soviets," "The Factories to the Workers," and "Land to the People."

Scene 2: Defense of the Soviet Republic—The Russian Commune

Having shed their weapons, workers and soldiers want to begin building a new life. But the bourgeoisie does not want to accept the loss of its supremacy, and begins an embittered fight with the proletariat. The counterrevolution meets with temporary success, manages to crush the unarmed workers, and Commune is saved only by a great surge of heroism of the worker Red Guard. Foreign imperialists send the Russian White Guard and mercenaries into battle against the Soviet Republic. The danger increases. Workers answer their leaders' summons "To arms!" by creating the Red Army. Fugitives from areas razed by the Civil War appear. They are followed by workers from the crushed Hungarian Soviet Republic. The blood of Hungarian workers calls for revenge. Welcomed by the people, lit by beams of the Red Star, the Red Army leads the heroic battle for Hungarian and Russian workers, and for the workers of the whole world. Red

labor befits the Red Army: it battles against the dislocations of war. The Communist *subbotnik*. The first lines of the workers' hymn.

APOTHEOSIS

The Third International. World Commune.

A canon salvo heralds the breaking of the blockade of Soviet Russia and the world proletariat's victory. The Red Army returns and is reviewed by revolutionary leaders in a ceremonial march. Kings' crowns are strewn at their feet. Festively decorated ships carrying the Western proletariat go by. Workers of the entire world holding labor emblems hurry to the World Commune's holiday. In the sky flare greetings to the Congress in various languages: "Long live the Third International," "Workers of the world, unite." A public triumphal celebration accompanied by the hymn of the World Commune, the "Internationale."

Unlike Acts One and Two, the third and final act of *Towards a World Commune* is set in twentieth-century Russia. Depicting a series of battles leading to and following from the October Revolution, the beginning of Act Three in many ways continues the chaos of Act Two, but treats the idea of revolution less as a symbolic game and more directly as warfare. As in Act Two, the energy of the revolutionary crowd and the fermenting of revolutionary wrath are of primary significance. Moreover, the sharp division between the real, living masses and the puppet government that we see in Act Two has become more pronounced. Fülöp-Miller called this section of *Commune* an example of "extreme realism."⁴²⁰ Spectators saw automobiles and trucks charging across the Square. They heard real gunshots, cannon fire and foghorns in the distance. Amid the enormous objects called upon to appear in the last act of *Commune*—two airplanes and a dirigible—were included more humble objects such as real household utensils and hammers. The sheer quantity of real world objects stood in sharp contrast to the towering puppet of Tsar Nicholas that was lowered into the Square from the top of the Stock Exchange. Having learned their lesson in Act Two, the workers do not wait for leaders this time. On their own, they attack and dismantle the enormous puppet. However, of crucial importance in Scene One of Act Three

⁴²⁰ Fülöp-Miller, 146.

is that the revolution only begins to achieve success when workers “are supported by an unstoppable stream of soldiers returning from the front.” It is the intervention of the military that permits the “crowd” (*tolpa*), mentioned twice before soldiers arrive on the scene, to turn into a “proletariat” by the end of the scene.

Scholarship on the Russian mass pageants tends to overlook the importance of the Red Army in their making, but the majority, like *Commune*, could not in fact have occurred without it. The Red Army, led by Trotsky, had a propaganda division separate from the Bolshevik party (the PUR), which lent its organizational skill, its technology, its machines and, most importantly, its soldiers to the mass pageants. In fact, mass pageantry became difficult to sustain after 1921 in large part because few soldiers were available to serve as actors. Although she does not offer any further insight into the moment, Katerina Clark aptly points out that the raising of the Red Flag at the end of Scene Two does not constitute the central event of *Commune*’s final act.⁴²¹ Were *Commune* ultimately a story about achieving socialist revolution, it certainly would be. Rather, the central event is the appearance of the Red Star, which then signals the entrance of the Red Army.

Although the appearance of the Red Star offers a clear example of the Red Army propagandizing on its own behalf, the turn *Commune* takes from a revolution of the working classes to a celebration of military strength has deeper implications. Having cast off the shape of the *trudiashchiesia* once and for all and achieved revolution, the revolutionary crowd that the pageant has worked so hard to create and sustain is now no longer needed. In fact, its iconoclasm renders it a threat to the newly established regime. The demands of building a post-revolutionary state require the transformation of the revolutionary crowd into an organized proletariat modeled on the bodies and movements of Red Army soldiers.

⁴²¹ Clark, 131.

The question of how to define the proletariat was a source of great debate both during and after the Civil War.⁴²² Among competing versions, however, one image of the proletarian hero was ubiquitous in posters, songs, poems and performances. As described by Eric Naiman, his body (since the ideal proletarian body is always male) is young, virile and athletic. He is a militant defender of communism whose reflexes have been conditioned to respond quickly to the slightest stimuli and whose body has been made organized, efficient and hence, super-productive.⁴²³ In essence, he is the fusion of industrial worker and soldier in the age of Taylorism and collective reflexology. A striking example of this fusion can be seen in a photograph taken by Aleksandr Rodchenko during a 1932 physical culture demonstration; a human-sized outline of a Red Star, contained within a large mechanical gear, organizes the body of an athlete, investing it with militant, revolutionary meaning (figure 44) .

Though the accomplishments of exceptional individuals, such as the one in this image, were often celebrated during the height of the Stalinist period, coordinated collective action—which the Red Army epitomized—remained a far more crucial social goal during the Civil War and for some time after (figure 45). For this reason, it is hardly surprising that *Commune*'s final performance of collectivity—the goal at which it finally arrives—is one of soldiers on the march. Trotsky saw marching columns as an example of the kind of Taylorist approach to social organization that would be necessary to regenerate Russia's collapsed economy and to renovate society as a whole. "Compare the movements of a crowd and of a military unit, one marching in ranks, the other in a disorderly way," Trotsky declares, "and you'll see the advantage of an organized formation. And so, the positive, creative forces of Taylorism should be used and

⁴²² Siegelbaum, 26-27.

⁴²³ Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 57.

applied to the current social and economic situation.”⁴²⁴ Vladimir Bekhterev also advocated marching exercises (for civilians as well as soldiers) because of the way in which they coordinate collective reflexes:

The coordinated efforts of many individuals achieve results unfeasible for ordinary persons. One may say that the energy and productivity of a collective is directly proportional to the coordination among its individual members and inversely proportional to their disunity. Collectives that lack appropriate organization tend to display a destructive, rather than creative force as exemplified by the unrestrained, chaotic actions of a crowd. These hold no hope of overcoming considerable obstacles.⁴²⁵

The emphasis that both Trotsky and Bekhterev place on the importance of collective coordination was frequently echoed in the sphere of cultural production by Left artists. Natan Altman, who was also the designer of *Commune*, defended futurist (Left) art against claims that its tendency towards abstraction rendered it anti-proletarian by pointing to the ways in which futurist art-works function as emblems of coordination and collectivity:

If you take out any one part from a futurist picture, it then represents an absurdity. Because each part of a futurist picture acquires meaning only through the interaction of all the other parts; only in conjunction with them does it acquire the meaning with which the artist imbued it. A futurist picture lives a collective life: By the same principle on which the proletariat’s whole creation is constructed. Try to distinguish an individual face in a proletarian procession. Try to understand it as individual persons—absurd. Only in conjunction do they acquire all their strength, all their meaning.⁴²⁶

For Altman, futurist works of art are rightly called proletarian because their significance depends upon the interaction of the materials they unite. The procession he chooses as a metaphor is not militaristic. Nor does it seem to involve any marching. Nevertheless, by comparing a “futurist picture” to a “proletarian procession” Altman unwittingly articulates a uniquely constructivist

⁴²⁴ Leon Trotsky, quoted in Beissinger, 33.

⁴²⁵ Bekhterev, 264.

⁴²⁶ Altman, 161.

conception of mass pageantry—one in which individual persons, serving as the human material with which the pageant-deviser works, acquire “strength and meaning” simply by being organized into a larger theatrical “construction.”

Thinking about *Commune* as a work of constructivist art allows us to see that its version of the proletariat depends upon an idea of the masses as material to be reorganized for the purposes of building both the theater of the future and the post-revolutionary state.⁴²⁷ Unlike the usual materials of Russian vanguard art (paint, paper, glass, wood and steel) with which artists such as Vladimir Tatlin and Aleksandr Rodchenko worked, the bodies of pageant performers served as the primary materials with which pageant-devisers created their monumental and explosive *konstruktzii*. But a mass of living human beings only becomes practicable *as material* when its individual members move synchronously and in an organized way. The writer and critic Viktor Shklovsky points to this fact in a review of *Commune* written shortly after he attended one of the pageant’s rehearsals:

I liked, above all that a parade was introduced into the structure of the mystery as an organic component. The result is a very interesting duality. According to the laws of art the structured movement of the masses—the enslaved and rebellious people—are equated with the ‘prosaic,’ that is, according to the laws of usefulness by the structured movement of the troops. This is the use of non-aesthetic material in a work of art. This made more of an impact on me than the numerical immensity of the mass in the mystery. This was devised by someone with talent.⁴²⁸

The moment Shklovsky praises in this passage came during *Commune*’s “Apotheosis,” when a full-scale Red Army parade marched through the Stock Exchange Plaza cutting through the mass

⁴²⁷ Defined as a “functional organization of material elements,” Patricia Railing argues that the concept of *konstruktziia* (construction)—in its broad scientific, philosophic, and technological meanings—became a key word amongst the revolutionary *intelligentsia* after 1912. “On it turned everything that sought its justification in the scientific process” including politics, social theory, and leftist experimentation in every artistic medium.” “The Idea of Construction as the Creative Principle in Russian Avant-Garde Art,” *Leonardo*, vol. 28, no. 3 (January 1995), 195.

⁴²⁸ Shklovsky, *Knight’s Move*, 51-52.

of performers and spectators. As it did so, the marching troops functioned both as real Red Army soldiers performing a military duty in July 1920 but also as actors playing soldiers who are returning from the front after the Blockade has been broken. The simultaneous occurrence of a real military spectacle and a theatrical entrance has, for Shklovsky, the effect of drawing attention to the process of the pageant's creation, one that involves incorporating aesthetic and non-aesthetic (prosaic) materials into a familiar narrative structure.

What makes it possible for Shklovsky to recognize *Commune's* mass of performers as the "material" with which the pageant works is their "structured movement," which, as he says, can only be the work of "someone with talent"—namely the directors responsible for devising the pageant. The methods used by directors to organize the mass of performers in a pageant determine the qualities of mass movement spectators are likely to recognize, such as rhythm, direction and energy. Although it is impossible to know which of *Commune's* five directors was responsible for the particular moment Shklovsky describes, the organizational methods that made such a moment possible are well known. According to most contemporary commentators (including the pageant's five directors) this feat was made possible by organizing the spectacle in advance at every possible level and by using military technology to allow the directing team to conduct the movement of masses from a centralized command post. Their methods of organizing the production constituted a significant innovation in the development of participatory mass theater.

The Proletariat as Electrified Mass Puppet

The original design for the production was created by Natan Altman. A sketch shows that he planned to subdivide the space by the use of color and shape (figure 46). The outer three columns on each side of the portico were to be wrapped in red, and the middle six, uncovered, were to

open up onto the central stage. For the central space Altman planned a kind of garden of green triangles. For unknown reasons, most of Altman's plans were, for the most part, discarded. Photographs from the production show that *Commune* looked nothing like what he imagined. Nor, however, do they adequately convey what many spectators, including Viktor Shklovsky, experienced:

The scale of the production is fine. Fine, when you introduce searchlights from the fortress of Peter and Paul. Fine when such a big piece of the city and its water take part in the spectacle. Maybe the scale of the production could be expanded in its composition to include the whole city, along with St. Isaac's Cathedral and the balloon over Uritsky Square. In such a spectacle, the construction cranes over the Neva should play leading roles.⁴²⁹

As Shklovsky's comment indicates, *Commune* turned the city into a theater for the space of six hours. The vastness of the space claimed by the pageant and its enormous cast meant that new methods of organization would have to be attempted.

The performance was divided into 110 "moments," defined by the entrances and turns of different groups of actors. Performed in numerical order, these moments constituted the "score" of the performance, which each director used to conduct rehearsals. The written score of *Commune*, a section of which survives in a 1926 book describing the mass pageants (figure 47), was arguably of far greater use to directors than the scenario. For each of the 110 moments, it gave details concerning the number of participants, the beginnings and ends of action sequences and all the properties, costumes, and technical effects to be used.⁴³⁰ Rehearsals were organized by dividing the 4,000 performers into groups of one hundred, each of which was assigned a descriptive name: potentates, rebels, "yellow" socialists and so on. These groups, defined by character and by scene, were then further subdivided into units of ten. Each unit elected a leader,

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁴³⁰ Piotrovsky, 13.

who took commands from the leader of his or her group. Group leaders were responsible for conveying the instructions of the director to the leaders of the smaller units. For rehearsals only the representatives were present.⁴³¹

In *The Mystery of Liberated Labor*, the directors and assistant directors had also been performers in the pageant; consequently, they directed the large cast of actors from within the pageant itself, using flags, megaphones, music cues and other sounds to convey directions. But *Labor* had restricted its playing area to the Stock Exchange steps and square and it had involved a mere 2,000 performers by comparison with *Commune's* 4,000. For *Commune*, which made use of the two bridges on either side of the square as staging areas, which relied on two battleships and the Petro-Pavlovsk Fortress for many of its lighting and sound effects, and which involved a much larger cast, the directing strategy used by *Labor* was seen as impractical and likely to make it difficult to achieve the pace, rhythm and variety of mass movement that *Commune's* directing team desired. The directors of *Commune* chose instead to employ a strategy very similar to that chosen by Parker and MacKaye in their pageants. Standing on a high platform around one of the rostral columns across the square from the exchange, the five directors communicated with performers and technicians using telephones, colored lights and flags. Radlov quickly became enamored of the way in which the new technology, provided by the Red Army, allowed him to control the movements of groups of performers at a distance. He could send large units, small units or even individual performers out onto the stage with the flip of a switch. He could instruct them to sit down or stand up with the push of a button. He delighted in the way that the movements of different groups of performers could be contrasted in geometrical patterns, and in the way that individual movements like the lifting of a hand could trigger a mass response.

“What perfect bliss—to feel, carry, watch over stage time!,” Radlov wrote in a 1922 article,

⁴³¹ Ibid., 14.

entitled “The Electrification of the Theater.” “To be the master of the theatrical minutes! To wave the conductor’s baton!”⁴³²

The division of *Commune*’s scenario into “moments” (as opposed to acts, scenes or episodes) is suggestive of Taylorist/Constructivist attempts to break down actions into increasingly smaller units so as to better control them. Moreover, Radlov’s ecstatic proclamation implies that the art of directing a mass pageant depends upon the director’s ability to design chains of collective reflex actions, and then to conduct the performance of those actions in such a way that they appear to be spontaneous and undirected. What Radlov describes is essentially a form of electronic mass puppetry, in which performers are remotely tied by invisible electrical threads to the directors, who control their movements, and also to one another. The organizational methods chosen by *Commune*’s directors in some sense reflected the fusion of technological skill, military precision and collective coordination seen at the time as necessary to the development of an authentic proletariat, and it exemplified the breaking down of boundaries between military, industrial, stage and state technologies. That actors in *Commune* were treated more as material to be used in the making of an enormous collectively-created mass pageant than as theater-makers in their own right, does not, in constructivist terms, signify its failure to be socially useful (an important tenet of constructivism). Rather, to become suitable material with which to make mass theater is itself to become socially useful. In being coordinated through the work of artist-directed technology, the masses are raised to a higher social and cultural status. By becoming a work of art, and being recognized as such, the masses begin to rise to the status of a proletariat.

⁴³² Sergei Radlov, quoted in Hakan Lövgren, “Sergei Radlov’s Electric Baton: The Futurization of Russian Theater,” in Nils Åke Nilsson, ed. *Art, Society, Revolution, 1917-1921* (Stockholm: Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature, vol. 11, 1979), 111-112. Radlov’s statement reveals Constructivism’s debt to Italian futurism. It also clearly responds to Lenin’s statement of February, 1920: “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country, since industry cannot be developed without electrification.”

Conclusion

The evolution of the social body that *Commune* traces—from bent-backed toilers, to energetic revolutionary crowds, to an organized, militarized and technologized proletariat—demonstrates, on the one hand, a point made by Soviet labor historian Paul Avrich. Avrich remarks that “The great achievement of the Bolsheviks was not in making the revolution but in slowing it down and diverting it into Communist channels. Their astonishing feat was their success in checking the elemental drive of the Russian masses towards a chaotic utopia.”⁴³³ Likewise, it is possible to see a mass pageant like *Towards a World Commune* more as an attempt to contain or to expend “revolutionary energy,” to speak in Bekhterevian terms, than to generate it.

On the other hand, Susan Buck-Morss makes a compelling point when she argues that “mass theater staged not only the revolution, but the *staging* of revolution, with all the ambiguous relations to power that such political theater implies. A mass of citizens, by re-enacting the revolutionary overthrow that is the legitimating moment of present power, exposes the contradictory logic of democratic sovereignty. Are the masses the source of political sovereignty or its instrument?”⁴³⁴ My own view with respect to *Towards a World Commune* is that it functioned more within the “contradictory logic of democratic sovereignty” than at a critical distance from it. Nevertheless, its success was not limited to its ability to contain the revolutionary energy of the masses and redirect it towards the construction of the post-revolutionary state. Such a task would have in any case been impossible given that the vast majority of the six-hour event was devoted to the task of sustaining revolutionary energy by re-enacting not just scenes of revolution, but the movements of revolutionary crowds. Significantly,

⁴³³ Paul Avrich, “The Bolshevik Revolution and Workers' Control in Russian Industry,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Mar 1963), 63.

⁴³⁴ Buck-Morss, 144.

the revolutionary energy created by these crowds only begins to be marked as “Bolshevik” at the moment when, after the Kerensky “government of appeasers” is defeated (Act Three, Scene One), two enormous banners featuring the faces of Lenin and Trotsky were lowered from the roof of the Stock Exchange. Up until that point, the work of *Commune*’s revolutionary crowds is to tear down whoever or whatever is in the way of the revolution. It may be said that, to the extent that a pageant like *Commune* is able to keep generating revolutionary crowds, it sustains not only the idea, but also the *habit* of revolution. Indeed, it became quite clear not long after Petrograd’s pageant summer that the revolutionary energies of Russian citizens had in no way been spent or diminished by years of war. The Kronstadt uprising against Bolshevik restrictions on demonstrations and the Tambov peasant uprising, which protested the Bolshevik practice of grain requisitioning, demonstrated that neither the idea nor the practice of revolution had yet been completely reduced to just one model--the Bolshevik, or October Revolution.

The mass pageants also helped to sustain the utopian longings of the theatrical Left through the dark period of the Civil War. In later years, Radlov remarked that “It was certainly impractical and naïve to dress the rainy town in cloth shirts; and, in general, it then seemed more natural to decorate the wall of a building with a futurist mural than to mend the pavement or the water supply.”⁴³⁵ Nevertheless, he looked back on the summer of 1920 with nostalgia, calling the mass pageants a “bold attempt of art to come out into the streets.”⁴³⁶ For many, like Radlov, the victory was in the attempt. After seeing *Commune* Shklovsky mused, “I envy the producers of ‘mysteries.’ It’s a pleasure to speak in a loud voice if one has a loud voice.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Sergei Radlov, quoted in David Zolnitsky, *Sergei Radlov: the Shakespearian Fate of a Soviet Director* (London: Harwood, 1995), 6-7.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁴³⁷ Shklovsky, 53.

Although mass pageantry commanded vast audiences during the summer and into the autumn of 1920, the “loud voice” in which pageants had spoken to Russian citizens during a period of intense political, social and economic crisis was reduced to a whisper when the end of the Civil War came in 1921 and when, subsequently, the New Economic Plan (NEP) was introduced. The NEP significantly scaled back the resources of the Red Army. With the primary source of funding for the pageants gone, as well as the primary source of performers, participatory theater found new outlets in small, experimental theater studios such as Blue Blouse, while civic celebrations increasingly relied on technology to fill the spaces once occupied by thousands of soldiers.

By the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1927, mass spectacles were again being staged, but in ways that little resembled the pageants of 1920. There was, of course, Sergei Eisenstein’s *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*, which in many ways reinvented the genre of mass pageantry for the cinema. There was also, however, *Ten Years*, a mass spectacle directed by three of *Commune*’s directors—Radlov, Piotrovsky, and Petrov. Though its ten staging areas occupied more than 1.5 square kilometers in the center of Leningrad, *Ten Years* employed only 2,000 performers, most of whom were part of a mass choir. More of a symphonic spectacle than a mass pageant, *Ten Years*, according to Katerina Clark, “made extensive use of searchlights, sirens, fireworks, [and] cannonfire,” as well as “huge figures representing the main actors in the Revolution.”⁴³⁸ These were transported on boats, and some were said to be two stories tall. Boasting that “the acting troupe comprises torpedo boats, launches, factory smokestacks, tugboats, pulling boats, emblems in light and letters picked out in fire,” Radlov was apparently pleased to point out the extent to which the spectacle’s enormous puppets dwarfed its human

⁴³⁸ Clark, 245.

performers.⁴³⁹ If the pageants of 1920, like *Commune*, struggled to give shape and meaning to the collective bodies of the masses of performers who participated in them, the mass spectacles of 1927 and those that followed them in the Stalinist era increasingly ignored or denied their very existence.

⁴³⁹ Sergei Radlov, quoted in Clark, 245.

Chapter Five
From Weimar Mass Pageantry to *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

In the nearly forty years that have passed since George Mosse's *Nationalization of the Masses* was published, many scholars have adapted his central insight that the political style of National Socialism was not, as his contemporaries argued, unique, or even in many cases distinctly "fascist." Rather, Mosse argued, the "aesthetics of politics" in the Nazi period of German history was the climax of a mutually reinforcing relationship between art and politics that had been developing since the time of the French Revolution.⁴⁴⁰ In her recent book, *Performing the Nation in Interwar Germany: Sport, Spectacle and Political Symbolism, 1926-1936* (2010), Nadine Rossol redeploys Mosse's argument, focusing closely on a ten-year period. Although she does not share the concern with theories and practices of performance to the same extent, she draws heavily on Fischer-Lichte's *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual* to argue that:

The time span from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s can be considered as a whole with regard to the development of political aesthetics and festive culture. A stress on rhythm, moving bodies and national community characterized many mass events in the Weimar years. When the National Socialists came to power in 1933, they continued and expanded many of the previously applied festive styles.⁴⁴¹

Rossol's study, which focuses on public and state ceremonials, traces aesthetic continuities across workers' demonstrations, sporting events, Weimar Constitution Day celebrations and the *Thingspiele* that were initially supported by the new Nazi regime. Surprisingly, however, she excludes all films from her study, including the most famous representation of the National Socialist state: Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 film *Triumph of the Will* (*Triumph des Willens*). Compressing six days of festivity and ceremony connected with the 1934

⁴⁴⁰ Mosse, 1.

⁴⁴¹ Nadine Rossol, *Performing the Nation in Interwar Germany: Sport, Spectacle and Political Symbolism, 1926-36* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2. See Fischer-Lichte, 150-51.

NSDAP Congress in Nuremberg into a two-hour documentary, the film attracted critical acclaim and garnered several international awards for its director, Leni Riefenstahl.⁴⁴² As a representation of the Nazi regime still accessible today, its influence has been lasting though its meaning has changed. As David Bathrick has demonstrated, *Triumph* today is used to provide “an iconic language to connote some form of absolute political evil framed as the now universal legacy of Hitlerian fascism.”⁴⁴³

Although it fits squarely within the context of “interwar mass spectacles” that both Rossol and Fischer-Lichte share, and its title (chosen by Hitler) clearly indicates the intention on the part of its creators to locate the film within a tradition of civic pageantry and mass spectacle, neither Rossol nor Fischer-Lichte treat the film in their respective studies. Yet, *Triumph of the Will* shares with live mass performances many of the same aesthetic and formal features identified by Fischer-Lichte and Rossol, even though it is a documentary film. As Matthew Wilson Smith and Mary Rhiel have demonstrated in their separate studies, the aesthetic principles that inform Riefenstahl’s camera work and editing derive in part from theater and performance traditions with which she was, or must have been, familiar. Describing *Triumph of the Will* as “a work that marks the translation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to film,” Smith demonstrates *Triumph*’s indebtedness to Wagnerian music-drama, theory and tradition in various aspects of its form and content.⁴⁴⁴ Articulating a relationship between Riefenstahl’s training in modern dance and the editing of her films (including *Triumph*), Mary Rhiel argues that the repetitive rhythms of film sequences created by Riefenstahl indicate “important continuities

⁴⁴² Riefenstahl was awarded the Gold Medal at the 1935 Venice Biennale and the Grand Prix at the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris.

⁴⁴³ David Bathrick, “The Afterlife of *Triumph of the Will*: The First Twenty-five Years,” in Neil Christian Pages, ed., *Riefenstahl Screened: an Anthology of New Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 74.

⁴⁴⁴ Matthew W. Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 93.

between aspects of Weimar dance culture and Nazi aesthetics.”⁴⁴⁵

Although this chapter does not claim that *Triumph of the Will* is a mass pageant like the others described in the present work, it does argue that interpreting *Triumph of the Will* through the lens of Weimar mass pageantry reveals both the ways in which the film reinvents the techniques and strategies of earlier spectacles and the ways in which it extends and mutates the defining characteristic of mass pageantry: that “the people” are represented to themselves. Before entering into a discussion of the film *per se*, I begin by briefly surveying some of the primary forms of mass pageantry that existed between 1918 and 1933. I will point out what the salient features of each pageant form are and I will indicate which of its techniques and strategies were reinvented by Leni Riefenstahl in *Triumph of the Will*.

Mass Pageantry in the Weimar and National Socialist Periods, 1920-1936

The image we have today of Weimar culture as abounding in erotically charged and highly experimental performances, which combined dance, theater, music, film and visual arts in innovative ways, is belied somewhat by the mass pageants of the period which did not, apart from the *Thingspiele*, generate much excitement. Indeed the fact that the numerous pageants and spectacles produced during the Weimar period, examples of which are to follow, failed to hold the attention of Germans has been pointed out by many contemporary scholars, including George Mosse. He explains this as a failure of the imagination, which merely made the elaborate myths, symbols and rituals of National Socialism all the more attractive to the majority of German citizens by contrast.⁴⁴⁶ On the whole, attempts to create community-affirming works of mass political theater during the Weimar period failed for two reasons. First, they tended to be

⁴⁴⁵ Mary Rhiel, “The Ups and Downs of Leni Riefenstahl: Rereading the Rhythms of the Memoirs,” in Neil Christian Pages, ed., *Riefenstahl Screened: an Anthology of New Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 208.

⁴⁴⁶ Mosse, 124-126.

aesthetically unbalanced, in the sense that they over-emphasized one or two aspects of performance (speech, movement, music, visual display, etc.) while neglecting others, rather than making sure that all aesthetic elements were used equally to communicate the central political ideas of the performance to spectators. Second, they failed simply because of overproduction. There were too many mass spectacles, pageants, and community celebrations offering different versions of “the people” and competing with one another for the attention of the working classes. Between those produced by the German Communist Party, by the Weimar government and by other “socialist” groups like the rising NSDAP, Germans could understandably be forgiven if they sometimes experienced a kind of “festive fatigue,” and chose to stay home or to go the cinema.⁴⁴⁷ Despite the general lack of stirring national spectacles in this period, a few pageants—and a few other pageant-like spectacles—stood out as at least partially successful. In their efforts can be discerned many of the same aesthetic principles and techniques used by Leni Riefenstahl and her collaborators in *Triumph of the Will*.

Unsurprisingly, given their leftist political affiliation, the earliest mass pageants to appear in the Weimar period were attempts to re-create the successes of Bolshevik Civil War pageantry. From 1920 to 1924, socialist organizations in Leipzig organized five *Massenfestspiele* (mass festival plays) designed to entertain workers and instruct them in the historical dimensions of the international socialist movement. Performed twice in cycling arenas, once on an enormous outdoor stairway, and for the last time on and near a lake, the number of amateur performers in the Leipzig pageants grew from 900 in 1920 to more than 3,000 in 1924. Despite their short-lived popularity, they had a marked influence on the aesthetic choices made by the devisers of later pageants and spectacles.

⁴⁴⁷ On “festive fatigue” see Yvonne Karow, *Deutsches Opfer. Kultische Selbstausslöschung auf den Reichsparteitagen der NSDAP* (Berlin, 1997), 150.

Spartakus (1920) and *Poor Conrad* (*Der Arme Konrad*, 1921) were written and directed by Joseph Fielitz, whose work, particularly on the latter production, was praised for its complex use of mass choreography, its vivid but simple lighting effects, and above all for its skill in “fusing the huge mass of performers into a single organic body.”⁴⁴⁸ Despite the artistic merits of Fielitz’s two productions, socialist critics found their content unsuited to the task of galvanizing German workers’ desire for revolution.⁴⁴⁹ It became painfully clear that the mass pageant form as it had developed in post-revolutionary Russia had been designed for victorious revolutionaries, not for those on the losing side of the 1919 workers’ uprisings in Berlin and Munich. The sting of numerous defeats was palpable in Fielitz’s pageants. *Spartakus* ended with a mass crucifixion of workers and a bitter song of revenge directed at Roman patricians. *Poor Conrad* ended in a monumental dance of death in which workers and their oppressors all march together through Death’s Gate.

On the strength of his credentials as a playwright and as the former six-day president of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, Ernst Toller, still in prison at the time for his involvement in the uprising, was called upon to write the scenarios for the Leipzig pageants of 1922, 1923 and 1924. True to his reputation as an orator who was often “intoxicated by his own words,” Toller’s pageants shifted the emphasis from song, movement and visual spectacle to individual and choral speech.⁴⁵⁰ The result, according to eyewitness accounts, was that the pageants became much more like conventional plays and thus both less interesting and less intelligible to spectators. Though the number of performers increased, audiences dwindled. A critic attending Toller’s

⁴⁴⁸ Anonymous reviewer, quoted in Cecil W. Davies, *The Plays of Ernst Toller: A Reevaluation* (London: Harwood Academic, 1996), 629.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 630.

⁴⁵⁰ Ernst Toller, quoted in Debbie Lewer, “Revolution and the Weimar Avant-Garde: Contesting the Politics of Art, 1919-1924,” in John A. Williams, ed., *Weimar Culture Revisited* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 6.

1922 pageant, *Scenes from the Great French Revolution (Bilder Aus Der Grossen Französischen Revolution)* suggested that, for the sake of clarity, the use of speaking choruses (*Sprechchöre*), ought to be supplemented by projected images and inter-titles.⁴⁵¹ Despite the warning, Toller's 1924 pageant, *Awakening, (Erwachen)* was an unmitigated disaster.

The idea to arrange the pageant so that spectators on one side of a lake would look across the water to staging areas on the other side was not inherently misguided. Similar strategies had been used in English and American pageants and were beginning to be used by Russian pageant-devisers. Both *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* (discussed in Chapter Three) and *Ten Years* (mentioned at the end of Chapter Four) were staged with bodies of water separating spectators and performers. However, in spite of the huge distance between performers and spectators, *Awakening* contained far more speech-making than any of its predecessors. Unable to hear a word and therefore unable to follow the pageant, thousands of spectators left early.⁴⁵² Although they attempted to generate revolutionary crowds, the Leipzig pageants ultimately failed even to generate audiences. Still, most of the pageants and spectacles of the next decade continued to feature speaking choruses, including Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, but like *Triumph* they tended also to make much greater use of visual elements and to employ modern sound and image technologies to hold the attention of spectators.

One year after the last of the Leipzig pageants drove working class audiences away in boredom and frustration, Erwin Piscator's "sociological" approach to the question of how to turn the audience into a revolutionary crowd culminated in a production that is often referred to by scholars as a "pageant," but which Piscator himself more accurately identified as a "historical

⁴⁵¹ Davies, 633.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 637.

revue.”⁴⁵³ The error occurs perhaps because *In Spite of Everything!* (*Trotz Alledem!*, 1925) was initially intended to be a mass pageant of the Bolshevik kind, comprised of “instructive scenes of the whole development of historical materialism” from the “Spartacus Rebellion” (the Third Servile War of the ancient Romans) to the Bolshevik Revolution.⁴⁵⁴ Funded by the Berlin branch of the Workers’ Cultural Union, the pageant directed by Piscator and written by Felix Gasbarra was to have included “2,000 participants, twenty gigantic spotlights, and massive symbolic props” including a sixty-five foot battleship representing British imperialism.⁴⁵⁵ The size of the endeavor ultimately proved financially burdensome for party officials, and so, in less than three weeks, Piscator and his collaborators re-designed and rehearsed a section of the original pageant to be performed in the Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin.⁴⁵⁶

The new play, which followed Karl Liebknecht’s path from *Reichstag* member to anti-war agitator, and from revolutionary leader to socialist martyr, was in many ways, despite its reduced form, similar to the other mass pageants treated in previous chapters: it involved approximately two-hundred performers (many of whom were workers and former soldiers rather than professional actors); it aimed to foster a sense of collective identity; its dramaturgical structure was determined by the chronological unfolding of real events in the life of a particular collective (German socialists); and it took place in the city where the events represented had in fact taken place (Berlin). However, the working class in *Trotz Alledem!* is nowhere represented

⁴⁵³ The subtitle of *In Spite of Everything!* is “a historical revue of the years 1914 to 1919 in twenty-four scenes with intermittent films.” Erwin Piscator, “*In Spite of Everything!*: The Documentary Play,” trans. Hugh Rorrison, in Attilio Favorini, ed., *Voicings: Ten Plays from the Documentary Theatre* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco, 1995), 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Erwin Piscator, *The Political Theatre: A History 1914-1929*, trans. Hugh Rorrison (New York: Avon, 1963), 91.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ The scene design of *Trotz Alledem!* was the work of Piscator’s longtime friend and collaborator, the Dadaist designer and artist John Heartfield.

as a collective protagonist. Rather, for the most part, they are in the background of scenes involving Liebknecht, Rosa Luxembourg, and their arguments with numerous Weimar leaders including Friedrich Ebert and Otto Landesberg.⁴⁵⁷ For this reason, *Trotz Alledem!* ended up resembling a medieval martyr play somewhat more than it resembled a mass pageant.

Although the mass pageant Piscator and Gasbarra had imagined did not materialize, *Trotz Alledem!* allowed Piscator to make his first thoroughgoing effort at creating a play in which “the text and the staging were based solely on political documents.”⁴⁵⁸ Concerning the innovative use of film “to show the link between events on the stage and the great forces active in history”

Piscator writes:

We used authentic shots of the war, of the demobilization, of a parade of the crowned heads of Europe, and the like. These shots brutally demonstrated the horror of war; flame thrower attacks, piles of mutilated bodies, burning cities; war films had not yet come into “fashion,” so these pictures were bound to have a more striking impact on the masses of the proletariat than a hundred lectures. I spread the film out through the whole play, and where that was not enough I projected stills.⁴⁵⁹

Drawing directly from a favorable review written by a socialist critic, Piscator identifies the authentic quality of the film sequences used in *Trotz Alledem!* and the fact that such shocking images had not yet been widely incorporated into war films as reasons for which the play’s audiences would have found them so emotionally wrenching, which apparently they did.⁴⁶⁰

Although Piscator intended for the film sequences and photographic stills to increase the authenticity of the live performances, and for the live performances to build up the dramatic tension of the film clips, the impact of the live performances seems to have been slight. Where

⁴⁵⁷ See Piscator, “*In Spite of Everything! The Documentary Play.*”

⁴⁵⁸ Piscator, *Political Theater*, 91.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴⁶⁰ The review Piscator draws upon is reprinted in *Voicings*, 10-11.

actors are mentioned in reviews of *Trotz Alledem!* it is often with encouragement to do better next time. Otto Steinecke, the reviewer for the newspaper of the Communist Party of Germany, *Die Rote Fahne*, offered high praise for the production's combination of film and live acting. However, he seems to be writing more about a powerful film that happened to include some live actors than about a live performance that made use of film to magnify and clarify its themes. Whereas spectators of Fielitz's pageants in Leipzig had been impressed by the organic movement of the collective body of performers, in *Trotz Alledem!* spectators were most affected, according to Steinecke, by the documentary images of war that appeared on the screen. After giving a lengthy critique of performers playing German politicians such as Gustav Noske and Philipp Scheidemann, of those playing Liebknecht and Luxembourg and further criticizing performances by the "actor-workers" of the play as too literal and lacking in energy, Steinecke reassures his reader that these substandard performances should have no effect on the value of the theatrical experience to prospective spectators. "The film itself," he says, "was the main event." He continues:

The war film gave the play its mood: the illustration, the directness of it, precisely that which one cannot portray just on a revolving stage. The film was the most stimulating element; it stirred us all up, deep down inside. The film was the capstone, it was absolutely necessary. Hopefully we can see this newsreel again very soon "on its own." It is a powerful propaganda instrument in its entirety, more than just in these short excerpts.⁴⁶¹

These remarks, taken together with Steinecke's earlier criticisms of the performers points to the central problem of *Trotz Alledem!*, which had nothing to do with revolving stages and other mechanical devices, as Brecht suggested was the case in Piscator's later productions.⁴⁶² Rather, by contrast with the documentary film sequences and stills, the performances given by the actors

⁴⁶¹ Otto Steinecke, quoted in *Voicings*, 13.

⁴⁶² See C.D. Innes, *Piscator's Political Theatre: The Development of Modern German Drama* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 199.

seemed inauthentic and worse: dull. This was so much so, in fact, that Steinecke suggested divorcing the film from the live performance and presenting it on its own to maximize its propagandistic potential. Although we cannot know the extent to which the film sequences in *Trotz Alledem!* had Piscator's intended "sociological" effect—to help spectators understand the real consequences of documents and laws created by politicians—what the play did make clear was that documentary film and photographic images of masses of human beings could have a profound effect on spectators, particularly when integrated into a larger narrative, rather than shown as items in a newsreel. Although Riefenstahl's film treats shots involving masses of human beings in a very different way from Piscator's "historical revue," the idea that such images do not merely report events happening elsewhere but can be used to arouse the emotions of spectators is one that informs Riefenstahl's editing of *Triumph of the Will*.

Nadine Rossol notes that the pageants and other festivals created by the Weimar state in order to represent its republican ideals have been neglected in current analysis of German culture of the period.⁴⁶³ This is an important point, given the substantial interest of scholars today in both the mass plays created by avant-garde artists like Piscator, who were on the far left of the Weimar political spectrum, and equally in the mass plays associated with the rise and establishment of National Socialism, particularly the *Thingspiele*.⁴⁶⁴ As Rossol explains, the art historian Edwin Redslob, chosen to occupy the new position of *Reichkunstwart*, was put in charge of nearly every aspect of state-cultural representation during the Weimar Republic: from choosing symbols, to redesigning currency, to selecting designs for monuments, to the staging of civic spectacles. Redslob's views on the latter were shaped in part by his friendship with modern

⁴⁶³ Rossol, 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Nadine Rossol, "Visualizing the Republic: State Representation and Public Ritual in Weimar Germany," in Williams, ed., *Weimar Culture Revisited*.

dance pioneer, Rudolf Laban, and were in any event consistent with the general views of artists and intellectuals across the political spectrum. His speeches and publications emphasized the importance of rhythmic movement, choral singing, symbolic display and large-scale amateur participation in the creation of civic celebrations—all standard characteristics of the early twentieth-century mass pageant.⁴⁶⁵

For the 1929 Constitution Day celebrations, Redslob devised a spectacle and asked Joseph Fielitz, the deviser of the first two Leipzig pageants, to direct it. Certain features of this spectacle—which borrowed elements of mass pageantry but which cannot itself be described as a mass pageant—have, as I will point out, obvious connections to the mass pageants that appear in the previous three chapters and also clarify the intention of certain sequences in *Triumph of the Will*. Most relevant to my present purpose is the symbolic mass choreography used by Redslob's spectacle to stage the construction of an enormous flag.

At the beginning of the spectacle, five hundred performers dressed as workers enter the stadium and begin to attempt to connect ten golden flagpoles to one another. In chorus, they explain to spectators in very direct terms, “We are the people/We create a piece of work/The living Reich.”⁴⁶⁶ When they find themselves unable to connect the poles on their own, they call upon the youth of the nation to complete the work. Led by another five hundred adult performers, thousands of children flooded into the stadium. Costumed in black, red and gold, they help their leaders to connect the large golden flagpoles into one enormous pole. They then arrange themselves into rows and columns to take the form of the flag of the Republic, thereby creating a living, moving painting that occupied most of the stadium floor. In Redslob's scenario,

⁴⁶⁵ Rossol, *Performing the Nation*, 63-64.

⁴⁶⁶ Erwin Redslob, quoted in Rossol, *Performing the Nation*, 74.

this moment was designed to “take possession of the stadium in swinging, flowing movements.”⁴⁶⁷ The device of using bodies, particularly the bodies of schoolchildren, to represent symbols of state power (flags and stars in particular) was already widely used in the United States and the Soviet Union—in pageants as well as in other kinds of civic spectacles—but had not, according to Rossol, been used in Germany prior to the Weimar period.⁴⁶⁸ Redslob’s flag display was the largest of its kind, and was generally well-received for its sense of color and mass movement.

As in other mass pageants of the period, the flag maneuver is a performance of collective labor intended to generate a sense of common purpose and collective identity. It is meant to represent a community, founded on republican values, working towards the construction of a more stable political system. However, whether it was because the National Socialist swastika and the Soviet star continued to hold the attention of much of the adult population of Germany, or whether the image itself lacked relevance, the staging of the Republic’s flag failed to generate much enthusiasm. According to Sabine Behrenbeck, Weimar civic ceremonies, like the 1929 Constitution Day spectacle, tended to suffer from an excess of “republican restraint.”⁴⁶⁹ Lacking enemies, heroes and powerful unifying myths, they neither explained the meaning of the past to the present, nor provided inspiring visions of a collective future. Despite Rossol’s suggestion that Redslob’s spectacles had more merit than some have given them credit for because he included the same elements of collective rhythm, mass participation, symbolic choreography and choral speech used by his contemporaries in the spheres of theater and dance, Redslob did not integrate

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁶⁹ Sabine Behrenbeck, "The Nation Honours the Dead: Remembrance Days for the Fallen in the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich," in Karin Friedrich, ed., *Festive Culture in Germany and Europe from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, (Edwin Mellen, 2000), 325.

these devices into a larger mythopoeic vision or historical narrative in which Germans could imagine themselves as a united people. Redslob, the art historian and friend of Laban, succeeded in staging pictures and in designing mass choreographies but failed to offer compelling visions of German national community.

The alleged “republican restraint” of Weimar spectacles stands in sharp contrast to the uninhibited expressions of grief and vengeance that were let loose on an enormous scale in *Thingspiele* such as Richard Euringer’s *Deutsche Passion, 1933* (1933) and Eberhard Wolfgang Möller’s *Frankenburger Würfelspiel* (*The Frankenburg Game of Dice*, 1936). These mass pageants, which evolved partly from the open-air theater movement and partly from the mass plays created by Max Reinhardt during the first two decades of the twentieth century, were created to be performed in massive outdoor amphitheaters that were to be built throughout Germany. Although most of the *Thingspiel* arenas were never completed, performances of the plays involved thousands of amateur and professional performers from varying segments of society on the scale of the Soviet mass pageants and engaged professional directors, designers and choreographers, many of whom were associated with *Ausdrucksanz* (expressive dance) culture during the Weimar period.⁴⁷⁰

Although there was no central organization of *Thingspiel* playwrights, the plays shared certain generic features. As in Expressionist theater, themes of death, sacrifice and spiritual-material oppression are woven through the *Thingspiele*. Yet their heroic protagonists, by contrast with those of Expressionist plays, are always the masses, struggling to survive in the midst of horrific historical circumstances that they have no power to influence. Often the dead victims of war and poverty return as ghosts in order to seek justice and are led in their crusade by Christ-

⁴⁷⁰ See Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 173.

like “strangers” from other worlds. In all the *Thingspiele* performed from 1933 to 1936, the myth of the heroic German *Volk*—a collective ideal that had been marginalized, excluded or repressed in the communist and republican pageants of the Weimar period—returned with new strength, and, more importantly, with stories that seemed to speak directly to the experiences of shame, deprivation and death around which many Germans in the 1930s could unite.

When the *Thingspiel* movement emerged in 1933, Joseph Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister of the NSDAP, along with Rainer Schlösser, head of the National Socialist Theater Administration, and Otto Laubinger, president of the Reich Theater Chamber rushed to lend their full support.⁴⁷¹ As Gerwin Strobl points out, however, the *Thingspiele* were ultimately “the fruit of individual initiative and not of ministerial prompting.”⁴⁷² In other words, though Goebbels and his colleagues saw the benefit of linking Nazi propaganda efforts to the popular new form of mass pageantry, the *Thing* plays succeeded more as performances giving voice to unresolved collective grief and trauma than as party rallies. In general, the *Thingspiele* placed a greater emphasis on vocal expression than on performing complex mass choreographies. Yet what they lacked with respect to the rhythmic, flowing movements and vivid colors of Redslob’s spectacles in the final years of the Weimar period, they made up for in speaking choruses whose voices, supported by the new loudspeakers and microphones, carried across vast distances with a clarity and precision never before thought possible.⁴⁷³ Thus it is the case that although the *Thingspiele* sought to evoke the Germanic past in their rock, river and tree settings, the effectiveness with

⁴⁷¹ National Socialist support for the *Thingspiel* movement is discussed in Gerwin Strobl, *The Swastika and the Stage: German Theatre and Society, 1933-1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 59-60.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 73-74.

⁴⁷³ See Larry Klein, “Audio Update: The History and Theory of the Dynamic Loudspeaker,” *Radio Electronics*, vol. 60, no. 1 (May 1989), 70-71; and Bob Heil and Allen Pitts, “The Microphone: A Short Illustrated History,” *QST*, vol. 90, no. 6 (Jun 2006), 50-52.

which they did so depended almost entirely on their use of modern technology.

Although the *Thingspiele* proved to be tremendously popular with audiences, the movement did not survive beyond 1935/6. Various explanations have been put forth as to why Goebbels would have put an abrupt end to the further production of *Thingspiele* in that year. Goebbels himself claimed that too few “good plays” could be found to fill all the arenas and thus justify the cost, but as George Mosse points out, this may only have been true in the sense that the *Thingspiele* did not suit Hitler’s conventional taste in drama.⁴⁷⁴ Erika Fischer-Lichte proposes that the *Thingspiele* ultimately failed to serve party interests because they represented the people as self-organizing communities that did not need political leaders, and because the “National Socialist belief in the power of the word ... led them to distrust performative means not guided and controlled by the word.”⁴⁷⁵ Neither point seems to be entirely accurate. As already mentioned, *Thingspiele* tended to feature Christ-like leaders of one kind or another, and they were written as choral play-texts to be read and spoken (many in fact started out as radio plays), not as scenarios relying primarily on visual means of expression.

Most likely, there are three interrelated reasons for the abrupt termination of Nazi support. First, as Gerwin Strobl points out, the inability to satisfactorily predict the propagandistic value of any particular theatrical collaboration or performance “remained a constant worry to the Propaganda Ministry.”⁴⁷⁶ I would add to Strobl’s point concerning the uncertainties inherent in the process of creating live theater that the *Thingspiele* were in any case not conventional works of theater; they were agitational pageants, intended to stimulate feelings of collective injustice and solidarity. Though *Thingspiele* may have reflected the revolutionary

⁴⁷⁴ Mosse, 183.

⁴⁷⁵ Fischer Lichte, 143-4.

⁴⁷⁶ Strobl, 74.

aspirations of National Socialism in 1933, by September 1934, when *Triumph of the Will* is filmed in Nuremberg, they are already out of step with the rapidly changing party. *Triumph* was created in the wake of events that suddenly altered the political hierarchy: the death of the German president, Paul von Hindenburg; the bloody purge of the leadership of the paramilitary SA (*Sturmabteilung*) including Hitler's chief rival, Ernst Röhm; and Hitler's subsequent rise to the position of Führer and Reich Chancellor. The film marks a turning away from the kind of "revolutionary" narratives one finds in the *Thingspiele* to "national" narratives in which Hitler and the NSDAP alone appear as the natural inheritors of a German legacy stretching back through the centuries.

In the end, the organizational effort and the financial investment necessary to supporting the production of *Thingspiele* across the country was not matched by its value as propaganda. Unlike mass pageants in England, the United States and Russia, *Thingspiele* were not admired outside of Germany as internationally significant works of theater. Thus they had no value as evidence proving the existence of "Nazi culture" to the world at large. On the domestic front, the creation and propagation of party ideology, of National Socialist versions of history, and of heroic representations of Hitler were carried out by the rapidly advancing technologies of radio and film.⁴⁷⁷ *Triumph of the Will* did borrow from the *Thingspiel* movement some of its emotionalism, its sense of the panoramic, its speaking chorus of workers and its mythic sense of the *Volk*. At the same time it sought to minimize the "cultic" aspects of National Socialist spectacle for which the party had already become notorious, and to instead present the ceremonies of the 1934 Party Congress in Nuremberg soberly and soundly as the long-awaited fulfillment of an ancient promise.

Pageantry, Film and *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

⁴⁷⁷ See Aristotle Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Reflecting in 1927 on his experiences as one of the directors of the post-revolutionary mass pageant *Towards a World Commune* (1920), the Russian avant-garde theater director Sergei Radlov expressed his joy at being able to control the movement of the onstage masses using communication technologies and lighting systems usually reserved for the Red Army. The new technologies allowed him to carefully conduct scenes as they were happening; with the flip of a switch or the push of a button he could subject the movements of different crowds of performers to his own intuitive sense of rhythm and pace. Groups of performers would no longer need to listen for cues to know when to act; they would only be required to watch for flashing colored lights to tell them whether to enter, exit, turn, gesture or speak in unison. Enthusiasm for the numerous ways in which new technologies promised to transform theater-making may have been what inspired Radlov along with his collaborators—Adrian Piotrovsky in particular—to turn their thoughts towards the cinema. As they continued to create mass pageants throughout the 1920s, Radlov and Piotrovsky also became known for their contributions to a growing body of early Russian film criticism.⁴⁷⁸

To a far greater degree than was possible in the live theater, film put the images of masses of human beings entirely at the disposal of directors. The success of Piscator's theatrical experiments, which combined film and live performance, testified to the impact of such images upon German audiences. Although some scholars, like James von Geldern, have pointed out that Sergei Eisenstein's films of the 1920s—*Strike* (1925), *Battleship Potemkin* (1926), and *October* (1927)—were in part influenced by what Eisenstein saw in the mass pageants, none have pointed out that mass pageants, in Russia as well as in the United States, Italy and Germany, also adopted

⁴⁷⁸ See Richard Taylor, *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* (London, Harper & Row, 1979).

the techniques, apparatuses and aura of moving pictures.⁴⁷⁹

Although standard accounts of the mass pageants discussed in the present work generally give the impression that pageants preceded film as the genre of mass performance, it is more accurate to say that mass pageants and mass movies (like those of the Lumière Brothers, D.W. Griffith and Fritz Lang) developed in tandem during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Both art forms drew artists who sought to communicate with mass audiences. Outdoor, nighttime pageants like the *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis* (1914) and *Towards a World Commune* (1920) created cinematic effects by using electric lights to illuminate the screen of the sky. Pageants not only created cinematic effects, they also borrowed aspects of film technique. For example, Jeffrey Schnapp points out that the mass pageant, *18BL*, devised in Rome in 1932 by the film director Alessandro Blasetti, used lights embedded throughout the performance site not only for the purpose of illuminating the stage, as other pageants had done, but also in order to make it possible to “cut” quickly from one episode to another. By using several stages instead of just one, and by illuminating only one of these at a time, Blasetti sped-up transitions between episodes and entirely avoided the need for traditional entr’actes and interludes.⁴⁸⁰ This technique was also used in directing *Thingspiele*. By the time *Triumph of the Will* was released in 1935, mass pageants had for some time been making use of the technologies and techniques of filmmaking to create more continuous narratives and more immersive experiences for spectators.

Whether or not Hitler intended to evoke the Roman practice of triumphal processions when he gave *Triumph of the Will* its name, the film’s basic structure suggests that the idea did not escape Riefenstahl’s attention. *Triumph* is framed by two processions. The first is a triumphal

⁴⁷⁹ See von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals*, 1-2; and See Janet Sorenson, “Lef, Eisenstein and the Politics of Form,” *Film Criticism*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Jan 1995), 55-74.

⁴⁸⁰ Schnapp, 60.

motorcade that follows Hitler's sparkling Mercedes-Benz through the streets of Nuremberg after his arrival by airplane (Lufthansa) while crowds of citizens eagerly push and strain against one another for the chance to see the Führer and to offer him their greeting. The procession that ends the film is a military review parade involving the Labor Service forces, the SA and Hitler's personal guard, the *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Even as the last frame fades away, images of marching men are superimposed upon more images of marching men. From the first image to the last, the film's frames march one after another in a manner that appears to be both perfectly continuous and perfectly organized. This is a result, no doubt, of the intensive six-month long editing process that Riefenstahl is said to have completed entirely by herself. As in any parade there are moments of boredom, but Riefenstahl's editing and multiple tracking shots make sure that we, as viewers of the film, never get stuck or linger too long in any one place.

Triumph of the Will strains against the definition of mass pageantry as it has been developed thus far, but instead of serving as an example of a spectacle that might be used to distinguish mass pageantry as a uniquely theatrical form, *Triumph* reinvents the idea of the pageant in ways that both reassert the early modern meaning of the term, and also reinvent the idea of "playing the crowd" for the modern genre of film. To begin with, the series of ceremonial spectacles created for the 1934 Party Congress by Albert Speer, chief architect of the Third Reich, conform for the most part to the definitions of pageantry proposed by Glynne Wickham and David Bergeron, whose studies of early modern civic pageantry I cite in Chapter One. Pageants are emblematic performances designed to entertain the sovereign (in this case, Hitler). "They involve the presence of the ruler—sovereign or mayor—they utilize public monies of city or guilds, they take place in the public arena and they celebrate national and civic virtues."⁴⁸¹

⁴⁸¹ Bergeron, 5.

They imply “a special occasion and a spectacular display quite out of the ordinary” and they are associated with “special State or civic functions, with processions and decorated streets, with flags and uniforms, with heraldic blazon and livery, with a sense of occasion.”⁴⁸² Pageants build onto and adapt the architectural features of major thoroughfares in cities and large towns, and they make use of advanced technologies to achieve spectacular effects. They require great cost and considerable organization, and they depend for their success upon the work of artists capable of “illustrating the relationship of the sovereign or magistrate to the state.”⁴⁸³ Taken together, these points would suggest that Speer’s spectacles constitute a pageant. However, the fact that they contain neither representations of fictional locations, nor mimetic representations of characters (in other words, nothing that implies theater or theatricality) means that, according to Wickham and Bergeron, the spectacles we see in *Triumph of the Will* cannot properly be regarded as pageants, either separately or in conjunction with one another, though they do display a sense of pageantry.

For Brian Winston, whatever greatness *Triumph of the Will* contains is due to Speer’s creativity in designing the spectacles, not to the mere “document” of it that Riefenstahl generates.⁴⁸⁴ It is Riefenstahl’s work, however, not Speer’s, that merges the events represented in the film into something that is nearer to a “mass pageant” than it is to a “documentary” if by this latter term is meant an unaltered recording or transcription of real events. That *Triumph* intends to serve as a historical founding document of the NSDAP is clear from the film’s first frames in which five rolling titles proclaim: “On September 5, 1934/ 20 years after the outbreak of the world war/ 16 years after the beginning of our suffering/ 19 months after the beginning of the

⁴⁸² Wickham, 51-52.

⁴⁸³ Bergeron, 287.

⁴⁸⁴ Brian Winston, “Film in Context: *Triumph of the Will*.” *History Today*, vol. 47, no. 1, January 1997, 28.

German renaissance/ Adolf Hitler flew to Nuremberg again to review the columns of his faithful followers.”⁴⁸⁵ It is well-known that Speer designed his spectacles with the creation of a documentary film in mind and that plans for the filming played an important role in the arrangement of the proceedings. Although Riefenstahl claimed that not a single scene was staged, this statement has since been thoroughly refuted. Some scenes in the film were very likely rehearsed (the Labor Service ceremony), some were certainly re-shot (the speeches by Party leaders), and some may even have been recycled from the film of the 1933 Party Congress, *Sieg des Glaubens* (*Victory of Faith*, 1934), copies of which were seized and destroyed because it centered heavily on the relationship between Hitler and Ernst Röhm, the SA leader whose murder Hitler ordered just a few months before the 1934 Congress.⁴⁸⁶

Such facts certainly challenge the presentation of *Triumph* as an ordinary documentary film. However, the very factors that render it inauthentic as a document also make it that much more like a pageant. Just as early modern and modern mass pageants blended history, myth and legend into a single continuous narrative using theatrical and performative techniques, so too does *Triumph's* editing aim to create a coherent story about a people and its sovereign using all the aesthetic strategies at the disposal of the director. That the film does not present a truthful account of the events as they actually unfolded, that it conceals recent acts of political violence through displays of harmony, and that it inaccurately represents the relationship between Hitler and “the people” as one entirely created by mutual bonds of affection suggests that “pageantry” is indeed a far more accurate term to describe the film than “documentary.”

As I discussed in Chapter One, twentieth-century mass pageants required the participation of actual citizens as performers and spectators as well as a dramatic narrative

⁴⁸⁵ *Triumph of the Will*, directed by Leni Riefenstahl (Synapse Studios, 2001), DVD, 2:15-3:00.

⁴⁸⁶ Winston, 27.

intended to teach them their history and instruct them in their duties. A “mass” pageant, by comparison with other kinds of pageants, takes “the masses” as its protagonist and depends upon “the masses” as the primary source of its creative labor. By that criterion, *Triumph of the Will* cannot be considered a mass pageant—not because it is a film rather than a live performance, but because it does not call upon a people to represent its own history and identity. Although the film does not involve popular self-representation *per se*, it nevertheless involves numerous popular constituencies—the Hitler Youth, the SA, the Labor Service and others—performing both for the pleasure of the sovereign (Hitler) and for the mass audience watching the film.

In analyses of the various mass performances of marching and saluting that take place throughout *Triumph of the Will*, Siegfried Kracauer’s 1927 essay “The Mass Ornament” (“Ornament der Masse”) is ubiquitous. In the essay, Kracauer uses a performance by the Tiller Girls’ dancing troupe to serve as an emblem for his concept of the “mass ornament,” which he then uses to explain economic production under capitalism. He writes, “Although the masses give rise to the ornament . . . they are not involved in thinking it through. As linear as it may be, there is no line that extends from the small sections of the mass to the entire figure . . . Everyone does her or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality.”⁴⁸⁷

Kracauer’s complete argument, which does not constitute a critique of mass spectacles, but rather of the structures of capitalism, has nevertheless been extended to discussions of films, mass gymnastics displays and even poetry. “Fascinating Fascism”—Susan Sontag’s famous critique of Riefenstahl’s work, in particular of *Triumph of the Will*—draws upon Kracauer’s concept of the “mass ornament” to argue that, in fascist regimes, “[the] rendering of movement

⁴⁸⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament.” In Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1995), 77.

in grandiose and rigid patterns . . . rehearses the very unity of the polity. The masses are made to take form, be design.”⁴⁸⁸ However, not all “mass ornaments” are equal. How masses bodies are represented in scenes like that of the war memorial service and military review—in which Hitler, Himmer and Lutze walk between enormous ranked columns of more than 100,000 soldiers—is markedly different from the way they are represented in a scene like the one known as “The Sea of Flags” in which 21,000 soldiers march across a vast open field, each one bearing his own individual Nazi flag.

In the War Memorial scene the emphasis is quite clearly on the ornamental quality of the massed rows of soldiers; in other words, on their function as design elements within the monumental landscape. The multiple high-angle, extreme long shots used in this scene allow their shape and order to be seen in totality by the viewer.⁴⁸⁹ By contrast, the Sea of Flags scene is filmed using vertical tracking shots which make it seem as though the camera descends from from a great height into the midst of the Sea of Flags several times. As viewers, we are occasionally positioned outside the moving spectacle, but for the most part we are carried along with the undulating waves of soldiers.⁴⁹⁰ What matters in the Sea of Flags scene is not the mass of soldiers as an element of design, but rather as an example of the kind of movement that the National Socialist movement intends to be.⁴⁹¹

Like Redslob’s Constitution Day “flag maneuver,” the individual participant in the Sea of Flags procession is subordinate to the whole. Both sequences constitute examples of “mass ornaments” insofar as each individual participant in them can only function as a small part of the

⁴⁸⁸ Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” in Susan Sontag, *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 92.

⁴⁸⁹ *Triumph*, 1:05:22-1:10:48.

⁴⁹⁰ *Triumph*, 57:04-58:44.

⁴⁹¹ See Smith, 98.

larger spectacle, and no individual participant is able to grasp the whole of the moving image. However, in the Weimar spectacle, the image of the collectively-created Republican flag would become illegible if an individual performer became incapable of holding up his part of the flagpole or if he failed to occupy his appointed location. By contrast, in the Sea of Flags scene, each individual soldier, bearing only his own flag, is entirely isolated from every other soldier in the spectacle. He is not only subordinated to the totality of the image, he is also unnecessary to the task of sustaining its legibility. The faces of the soldiers are entirely hidden by their flags, as if to emphasize the fact that the coherence of the image does not depend upon the efforts of any one participant. Each person is entirely replaceable, existing in a wholly functional relationship to a movement that progresses with or without him, under which he might be crushed, but which, one way or another, he will have no capacity to alter. Framed so that its borders are always obscured, the Sea of Flags procession is presented as a march that, like the National Socialist movement, is boundless and eternal. Hitler, too, as he tells a great gathering of Hitler Youth, is only a part of the movement that will carry on with or without him: “Regardless of whatever we create and do, we shall pass away, but in you, Germany will live on; and when nothing is left of us, you will have to hold up the banner which some time ago we lifted out of nothingness.”⁴⁹² Death is no obstacle.

Another moment of mass performance in the film is notable for rendering its potential mass ornament almost entirely invisible. In a scene depicting a night rally outside Hitler’s hotel we see the conductor of the largest military ensemble of the Third Reich energetically instructing his musicians in the performance of a Prussian march; the musicians themselves are barely

⁴⁹² *Triumph*, 51:41-52:05.

visible in the darkness.⁴⁹³ Knowing that Riefenstahl spent six months editing her footage of the six-day event, we may well ask why she would have held on to this particular sequence. It is certainly possible to see in the image of the conductor a metaphorical resonance with Hitler, for whom the piece is being played during a night rally outside his hotel. We never see Hitler in this scene, so it may well be that the band conductor serves as both a substitute for and as a useful analogy for the Führer in his relationship to the people. Just as a band or an orchestra trains its eyes and ears in the direction of their conductor, learning the rhythms and tempi of the music by reading his bodily movements, so too is the Führer the sole conductor of the state, and the sole individual whose speeches and gestures the people must strive to understand and, in a sense, replicate.

The trope of Hitler as conductor is made explicit in several moments throughout the film, but none is more obvious than one in which the music that accompanies the Sea of Flags scene is all at once cut silent when Hitler lowers his arm.⁴⁹⁴ This moment also evokes at least two other conductors connected with the film. The first is Richard Wagner. Although Celia Applegate has demonstrated that Wagner's influence on the music of *Triumph of the Will* has been overestimated, I would suggest that Wagner's ideas concerning the role of the conductor helps to illuminate the work of the second "conductor" who is, of course, Riefenstahl herself.⁴⁹⁵ In *On Conducting* Wagner writes, "The whole duty of a conductor is comprised in his ability always to indicate the right tempo. His choice of tempi will show whether he understands the piece or not. With good players again the true tempo induces correct phrasing and expression, and conversely,

⁴⁹³ *Triumph*, 11:48-12:54. Celia Applegate, "To Be or Not to Be Wagnerian: Music in Riefenstahl's Nazi-era Films," in *Riefenstahl Screened*, 193-194.

⁴⁹⁴ *Triumph*, 58:44.

⁴⁹⁵ Celia Applegate discusses the real and imagined influences of Wagner's work on Riefenstahl's films throughout "To Be or Not to Be Wagnerian."

with a conductor, the idea of appropriate phrasing and expression will induce the conception of the true tempo.”⁴⁹⁶ For Wagner, the good conductor is one who is able to discover the “true” tempo of a musical composition (rather than the tempo dictated by the metronome) and who then conveys this understanding to his players. If the players are reasonably good, or even ordinary, they will be able to match the tempo set by the conductor and thus play the piece correctly. According to Wagner, audiences responded better to a piece of correctly played music than to one played incorrectly. The aesthetic responses of spectators, he suggests in *On Conducting*, are not linked to the inherent quality of a musical composition, but to the extent to which the music is correctly played.⁴⁹⁷

Finding the right rhythm (instead of tempo) was similarly important for Riefenstahl in her work as an editor of her films. She writes, “The feeling for dance is very similar to the feeling for cutting, especially in a documentary. For me, the documentary is like a dance. They are both rhythm.”⁴⁹⁸ As Mary Rhiel aptly points out, Riefenstahl’s signature rhythmic style of editing was likely the result of her training and experience as a student and performer of expressive dance (*Ausdruckstanz*).⁴⁹⁹ Riefenstahl studied with teachers including Jutta Klamt, Eugenia Eduardova and even, for a time, Mary Wigman, the most famous practitioner and teacher of expressive dance next to Rudolf Laban. She performed publicly throughout Germany in 1923 until permanent injuries forced her off the stage. For proponents and practitioners of expressive dance, rhythm was not merely a matter of mathematics: it was a mode of understanding self and society

⁴⁹⁶ Richard Wagner, *On Conducting*. trans. Edward Dannreuther (London: William Reeves, 1887), 20.

⁴⁹⁷ “Even the shallowest theatrical concoctions, played at the smallest Parisian theatres, can produce an aesthetical effect since as a rule they are carefully rehearsed and correctly rendered. The power of the artistic principle is in fact so great that an aesthetic result is at once attained if only some part of that principle be properly applied and its conditions fulfilled: and such is true art, although it may be on a very low level.” (Wagner, *On Conducting*, 90).

⁴⁹⁸ Leni Riefenstahl, quoted in Rhiel, 212.

⁴⁹⁹ Rhiel, 208.

in relation to art and nature. Indeed, were Riefenstahl to have modified Wagner's suggestion to his fellow conductors that they ought to learn to sing in order to understand the essence of a musical composition, she might have suggested not singing, but dancing as a way to understand the essential rhythms of an art-work.

But what is the work she plays in *Triumph of the Will*? As constructed by Riefenstahl, it might be called the dance of the Führer. Hitler changes partners throughout the film, dancing from one crowd to the next. If they are not all equal in his affection, he assures them one at a time that they are all necessary to achieving the goal of unity. Riefenstahl's film reflects neither National Socialism, Nazi aesthetics, nor fascist aesthetics, but rather her own understanding of what aspects of the Nazi repertoire of speeches, processions, symbols and gestures could be played to best effect. Her ability to give rhythmic and temporal shape to the events of the Congress is significant for understanding the way in which the film manufactures a version of mass popular participation that includes not only the collectivities represented in the diegetic world of the film, but also the collective audience of the film. The clearest example of this occurs in a scene towards the end of the film when Hitler, holding his personal flag (the *Blutfahne*), moves down a seemingly endless line of soldiers, one by one touching his flag to each of theirs.⁵⁰⁰ As in other mass spectacles, the ritual of the *Blutfahne* employs the device of passing a sacred symbol from hand to hand in order to establish bonds of loyalty and affection between individuals. In this particular case, it is unusual that the soldiers never pass flags amongst one another. They do so only with the Führer. As Hitler arrives in front of each soldier to bless his flag and shake his hand, he looks him directly in the eyes. The rhythm of the cutting in this scene

⁵⁰⁰ *Triumph*, 1:15:08-16:36. The *Blutfahne* (Blood Flag) was an SA banner used in the failed 1923 Munich coup (the "Beer Hall" *Putsch*) during which sixteen NSDAP members were shot and killed by police. Stained with the blood of the party faithful, and held by police for 2 years before Nazi leaders were able to recover it, the *Blutfahne* became a sacred object of Nazism. It was used in numerous rallies and ceremonies during the Third Reich.

is structured around a steady beat of cannon fire: shots of Hitler looking into the faces of soldiers are intercut with shots of soldiers standing by, and with shots of cannons firing. In three or four moments, it even seems as if Hitler is looking at, or just past us—the viewers of the film. If we, as viewers, are seduced into a feeling of participation in a sacred ritual by the rhythm and tempo Riefenstahl sets up in this scene, it is because she has understood the music of the Nazi oath of loyalty and conveyed it correctly, as Wagner would want, not necessarily because we have understood its meaning or accepted it ourselves. Linda Schulte-Sasse reminds us that “the effect of political films often occurs on an “unpolitical” level.”⁵⁰¹ As viewers on the outside of the spectacle, we can choose to return the gaze or to look away.

The frequent oscillations between shots of Hitler, shots of various crowds and individuals looking at Hitler, shots of Hitler looking at the crowds, and in the end, shots of Hitler looking (almost) at us as is what makes it possible to see *Triumph* as, according to Glynne Wickham’s definition of a pageant, a “ritual bringing ruler and subject into mystic communion” in which “the starting point [is] the physical manifestation of the ruler’s person to the subjects assembled within the capital city.”⁵⁰² In *Triumph*, as in all pageants, the visibility of the body of the sovereign, in its representation as the body of the nation, is central to the formation of national identity. As a national body, Hitler may be more exposed than most sovereigns before him in *Triumph of the Will*. The camera stands directly behind him in the motorcade, giving us close-ups of his right hand and ear. Throughout the film he is caught in “candid” moments, smiling, chatting, perspiring and even at times, grabbing his belt as if overwhelmed by his own powers of speech. In shots such as these, *Triumph* aspires to an intimacy that could hardly have been

⁵⁰¹ Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 13.

⁵⁰² Wickham, 52-53.

imagined by early modern pageant spectators and participants.

However, it is not only Hitler who occupies the camera's gaze throughout the film. In sequence after sequence, Riefenstahl's cameras offer us, as viewers, privileged access to multiple views of every spectacle, character and emblem in the film. At times, the film suggests that we are even in the sovereign's seat—as, for example, at the very beginning when a long sequence shot from inside an airplane intimates that we might be looking out its windows through Hitler's own eyes.⁵⁰³ At other times, the camera serves as the eye of the crowd, allowing us to occupy various positions within the numerous crowds of the film in order to look out, up, down and all around. Still there are other moments when we stand apart from the crowds of the film, able to maneuver under them, over them, or around them in order to see the ceremonies. Although Matthew Wilson Smith interprets the technique of constantly shifting camera angles and positions as a strategy of disorientation intended to render Hitler as the only point of stability in the film, I regard it as a strategy for sustaining a fabricated, non-obligatory sense of participation, one that allows (or induces) the viewer to believe that she has participated in an event of extraordinary proportions without, as one contemporary German put it, “having to go to Nuremberg and stand around all day.”⁵⁰⁴ The work of the cameras is to induce (or to allow) us to feel not only that we are part the pageantry, but also that we have the freedom to extract ourselves from it in order to be able to survey it in its totality.

Distinct from the “pleasure of seeing and being seen” that Linda Schulte-Sasse describes as the particular pleasure of participants in mass rallies, it is ultimately the pleasure of seeing

⁵⁰³ *Triumph*, 3:05-4:44.

⁵⁰⁴ See Smith, 98-99; Cited in Karow, 150.

without being seen that *Triumph* affords its viewers.⁵⁰⁵ However, apart from allowing us to become crowd *voyeurs*, the near constant mobility of the cameras also invites us to judge the authenticity of the communal passions represented in the film for ourselves. Although much has been said about the way Riefenstahl represents Hitler as messiah and angel, or about the way that the marching and maneuvers of soldiers exhibit an “aesthetics of containment,” relatively little attention has been paid to the careful treatment of the facial expressions, gestures and bodily movements of ordinary citizens.⁵⁰⁶ Kracauer is an exception. He points out that “The cameras incessantly scan faces, uniforms, arms and again faces, and each of these close-ups offers evidence of the thoroughness with which the metamorphosis of reality was achieved.”⁵⁰⁷

For Kracauer, close-ups of body parts, costume details and faces constitute evidence of an entirely transformed reality that extends to every part of every individual person, one in which reality itself has been consumed by the “artificial structures of the Party Congress.”⁵⁰⁸ Yet it is to close-ups on the faces of individuals in the crowd to which the camera always returns, because, as the scene of the *Blutfahne* suggests, it is how we, as viewers, read those faces that matters. Historian David Waldstreicher proposes the concept of a “system of visible virtue” to explain how, in celebrations of the early American republic, physiognomy was the primary factor in judging the authenticity of a citizen’s “federal feeling.” To participate in celebrations was thus an invitation to have one’s face inspected and judged by one’s fellow citizens for its sincerity of

⁵⁰⁵ Schulte-Sasse, 32.

⁵⁰⁶ Sontag, 93.

⁵⁰⁷ Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: a Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 301.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 300.

patriotic expression.⁵⁰⁹ Similarly, *Triumph of the Will* creates, through more than a hundred close-ups, a kind of “system of visible faith” by which to assess the authenticity of the joy with which the people greet the Führer. As Rudolf Hess tells us in the film, Hitler is the absolute actor and judge (“When you act, the nation acts; when you judge, the people judge.”) but *Triumph’s* close-ups, long-shots and multiple in-and-around-the-crowd tracking shots potentially persuade us that we are in possession of this authority as well. We may judge the authenticity of events and facial expressions on our own since, ostensibly, the evidence is always right in front of us. However, Hitler warns us twice in the film that those who would believe that what they see in front of them is merely a spectacular show of coercion rather than a supreme act of sacrifice are only fools who deceive themselves. The enemies then, of *Triumph of the Will*, are all those who choose to reconstruct its reality and subject it to their own judgment, an interpretive practice that the film itself unwittingly makes possible.

⁵⁰⁹ Waldstreicher, 84.

Conclusion

Obsessed, bewildered

By the shipwreck
Of the singular

We have chosen the meaning
Of being numerous.

George Oppen, Section 6 of *On Being Numerous* (1968)

In a class I taught some years back, I showed students an aerial photograph of the Berlin Love Parade taken by Andreas Gursky, the preeminent photographer of crowds (Figure 48). Without revealing its title or subject, I asked them to describe what they thought was happening in the photograph. Although I had imagined that they would arrive at some sort of consensus, their responses were evenly divided. Half said that the photograph depicted hundreds of people being lured into a dark and forbidding forest, while the other half said that it showed people emerging from a forest into a sunlit field. Where some saw coercion, others saw liberation. No one claimed to be certain. From the great height at which Gursky takes the picture, it is impossible to be sure precisely what in fact is going on. For the viewer—even one who knows the title of the piece—the inability to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to whether it exhibits the innocent, communal joy of the Love Parade or, conversely, exposes its frightening “herd mentality,” is a source of frustration as well as an invitation to reflect on one’s own assumptions.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, mass pageants negotiate tensions between competing conceptions of collectivity; their inherent contradictions are integral to their broad appeal. In the years since I began the present work, I have introduced the subject of mass pageantry to many different groups and individuals, and have found that every person comes to the subject with their own set of associations. Often those who have participated in or attended

pageants are predisposed to find them uplifting or awe-inspiring, while those who haven't tend to regard their potential for coercion as frightening. Much depends, as with my former students, on how one chooses, as George Oppen puts it, "the meaning of being numerous."

Opportunities to reflect on the significance of "numerousness" through the medium of live performance are no less abundant now than they were in the early twentieth century. Although pageants have moved from the center to the periphery of public attention in most places in the world, they have not disappeared. Large-scale, government-sponsored mass pageants of the kind discussed in the present work are no longer, for the most part, seen in Europe and the United States, but they are still regularly produced in China and in North Korea. The largest mass pageants still in existence are unquestionably those produced every two years by the host countries of the Olympic Games. In recent years, the opening ceremonies of the Games have included mass performances of elaborately constructed national myths combining athletic competition, cinematic spectacle, indigenous national traditions and digital technologies. Religious pageants, in particular the Oberammergau passion play, continue to draw thousands of visitors, as do historical and community pageants, like the *Ramona Pageant* in Southern California, which has been performed annually since 1923. "Protest" pageants, like the *Paterson Strike Pageant* of 1913, and pageants concerned with pressing social issues, like the *National Women's Suffrage Pageant* (also 1913) remain potent instruments of political activism across the globe.

Like the pageants of the early twentieth century, these different kinds of theatrical events are best understood, not by splitting off aesthetic concerns from political purposes, but by looking closely at the ways in which the conflicts and contradictions between political, aesthetic and social concerns are imaginatively resolved through the work of performance. The

communities one sees represented in today's pageants are, like those of the early twentieth century, more likely to embody that community's aspirations than its immediate realities. The techniques, modes and styles of performance chosen by pageant-devisers will, explicitly or implicitly, reflect arguments about the meaning and purpose of collectivity. What most distinguishes the mass pageants of the early twentieth century from those that exist today is that the latter are not part of a widespread movement to transform the art of theater by linking it to movements in mass politics and culture. The idea at the heart of all early twentieth-century mass pageants—that a community can be revealed to itself by enacting its own stories—continues to serve as a basic tenet of what is now variously called “theater for social change,” “theater of the oppressed,” or “applied theater.” However, the utopian imaginings to which this idea was linked in the early twentieth century are, for better and for worse, a thing of the past.

One of the questions I am most often asked about mass pageants is whether or not they were successful. For the most part, those who ask are not interested in whether they achieved particular political goals, but in whether or not they achieved some kind of lasting bond amongst participants and spectators. Unfortunately, there are few edifying responses to this question. All pageants create a bond of one sort or another for some duration, but this may be no more lasting than in any other kind of live performance event or spectacle. Of those that we can call “successes”—only because they were widely reported in the press as such—we need not celebrate too heartily since they often succeeded at the expense of the most powerless citizens. A more important question to ask may be: why, in looking back at the mass pageants of the early twentieth century, do we wish they had proven to be a consistently successful means of establishing collective ideals and collective identities?

We may find some clues in the fact that four major books published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, roughly one hundred years after the re-emergence of pageantry in Europe and the peak of “crowd theory,” all aim to address questions concerning collectivity by considering crowds and spectacles of the past. Susan Buck Morss’ *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (2002) looks back with both nostalgia and criticism at the “construction of mass utopia [that] was the dream of the twentieth century.”⁵¹⁰ *Crowds* (2006), edited by Jeffrey Schnapp and Matthew Tiews, delivers a “deliberately crowded, multilayered look at modern multitudes” by weaving together full-length essays, first-hand testimonials of crowd experiences and “microhistories that track the shifting semantic fields of key vocabulary concerning collectivities.”⁵¹¹ In addition to the contributions of these scholars, David Rockwell and Bruce Mau’s *Spectacle* (2006), “explores those spectacles that are manmade phenomena and that people share through live experience,” in order to “open a window onto a way of looking at wondrous events that connect people in real time and real space.”⁵¹² In a similar vein, Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Dancing in the Streets, a History of Collective Joy* (2007) sings the virtues of ecstatic communal celebration by focusing on the “kind of events witnessed by Europeans in ‘primitive’ societies and recalled in the European carnival tradition.”⁵¹³

While Rockwell, Mau and Ehrenreich are the most heavily invested in a nostalgia for spontaneously occurring crowds, expressions of collective effervescences and the overturning of established hierarchies, Buck-Morss, Schnapp and Tiews are not entirely immune to the desire to

⁵¹⁰ Buck-Morss, x.

⁵¹¹ Jeffrey Schnapp and Matthew Tiews, “Introduction” in *Crowds*, edited by Jeffrey Schnapp and Matthew Tiews (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), xiv.

⁵¹² David Rockwell and Bruce Mau, *Spectacle* (New York: Phaidon, 2006), 15.

⁵¹³ Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets, a History of Collective Joy* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 1.

recover and archive authentic crowd experiences in their own books. This is most evident in Buck-Morss' discussion of the Russian avant-garde, and in the "testimonies" that appear throughout *Crowds*. Only Schnapp and Tiews, however, explicitly recognize the broader historical context in which their project, as well as my own project here, and those undertaken by Ehrenreich, Rockwell, Mau and Buck-Morss are at least partially embedded. "In the developing world," they assert, "contemporary mass actions appear to have become ever more 'citational'—they quote, sometimes in a nostalgic key, from a previous, now irrecoverable heroic era of crowds."⁵¹⁴ Whereas the crowd theorists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw crowds as signs of social disintegration, we in the twenty-first century cannot help but look back with some regret at the fearsome power such crowds once commanded.

For some crowd "re-animators," like Rockwell and Mau, crowds and the spectacles they create are a necessary antidote to an overdose of "reality and reserve" in modern social life.⁵¹⁵ Asserting the emancipatory power of crowds, they exhort their readers on the back cover to "Log off, and join a crowd." But we can also now, whenever we choose, log back in again if we want to join the kinds of crowds that, unlike those of the early twentieth century, are seen as vital to accelerating the pace of commerce in the twenty-first century. Crowdsourcing, crowdfunding and microwork (crowd labor) are just a few examples of the ways in which the Crowd has transformed from an emblem of irrationality into a model of corporate "wisdom." Whether crowds exist as real or as virtual collective bodies, they no longer pose a significant threat to the social order. They have instead been thoroughly domesticated. If early twentieth-century mass pageants sought to counter stultifying and sometimes brutalizing experiences of crowdedness by

⁵¹⁴ Schnapp and Tiews, xi.

⁵¹⁵ Rockwell and Mau, 15.

inventing transcendent myths of the people in which the people itself could participate, live spectacles in Europe and the United States now tend to romanticize the experience of being part of a living crowd of human beings, often promoting the ways in which such experiences allow one to become an authentic member of a counter-culture for a brief period of time. In looking back at the Festival of Federation in 1790, it is not the Festival itself one dreams of recreating, but its *citoyens*. Similarly, Woodstock revivals do not aim to recreate the “Aquarian Exposition” of 1969, but rather its crowds and crowd-surfers.

Illustrations

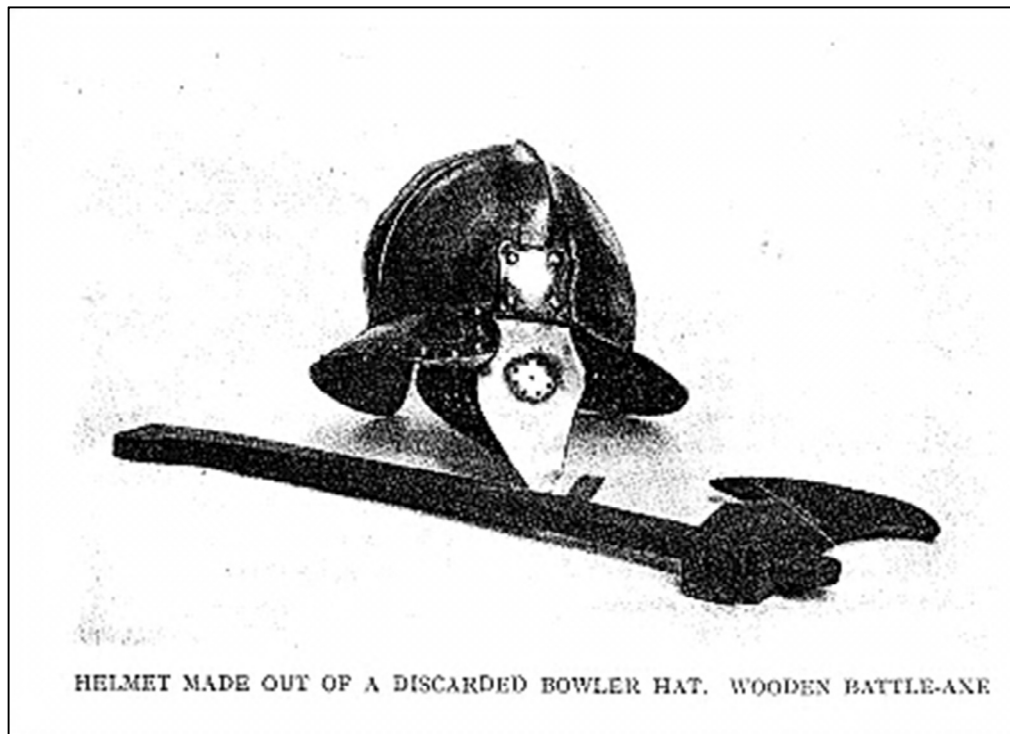


Figure 1. "Helmet made out of a discarded bowler hat. Wooden battle-axe."

Parker, *Several of my Lives*, facing page 286.

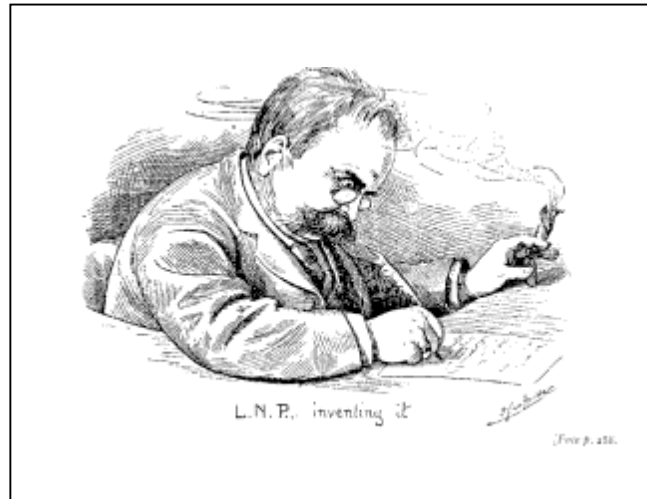


Figure 2. “L.N.P. inventing it.”

Parker, *Several of my Lives*, facing page 289.



Figure 3. “The Sherborne Pageant of 1905, Mother of All Pageants.”



Figure 4. "British optimism and the weather." ("It is strange that our national hat is one to which rain is singularly inimical. Women, of course, dress from head to feet with a view of eternal sunshine. We arrange for wonderful outdoor fêtes and pageants – which always end like this.")

W.K. Haselden, *Daily Mirror*, 26 May 1924.



Figure 5. “The Mystery of a War-Time Transformation” (“Crowd of fairly ordinary looking human beings waiting for a train. Extraordinary metamorphosis when the train comes in.”)

W.K. Haselden, *Daily Mirror*, May 4, 1918.

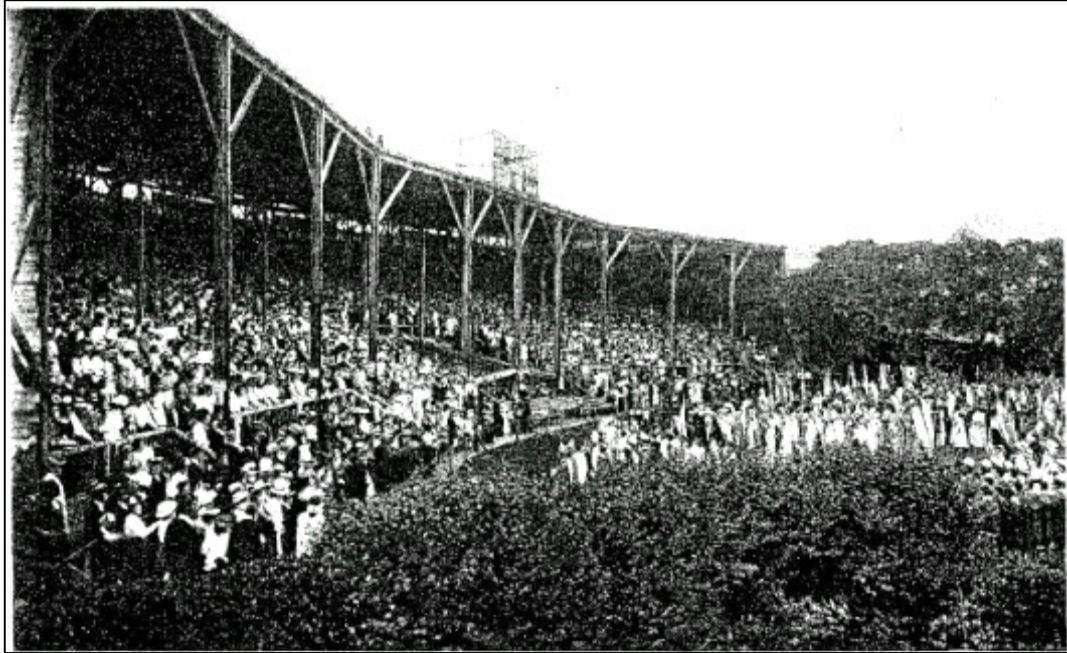


Figure 6. "Dress Rehearsal at Dover" The grandstand, concealed orchestra section in the center, and the crowd's nest are visible.

Parker, *Several of my Lives*, 280.



Figure 7. "First Rehearsal for the Warwick Pageant." A view of the arena from the grandstand.

Daily Mirror, May 26, 1906.



Figure 8. “The Aborigines Sacrificing in the Foreground, The Scir Burn.”

“The Historical Drama at Sherborne.” *The Review of Reviews*, vol. 32, no. 187, July 1905.



Figure 9. “Getting up a Pageant at Noburgh” (“This is a ruin of some sort – why shouldn’t Noburgh have a pageant?”)

W.K. Haselden, *Daily Mirror*, June 26, 1923.



Figure 10. "Roger of Caen laying the foundation stone of Sherborne Castle"

"A Unique Historical Drama," *Public Opinion*. vol. 39, no. 6, August 5, 1905.



Figure 11. Women gathered to make costumes. “Mrs. Golding’s Working Party at Pageant House.”

Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucester Graphic, February 15, 1908.

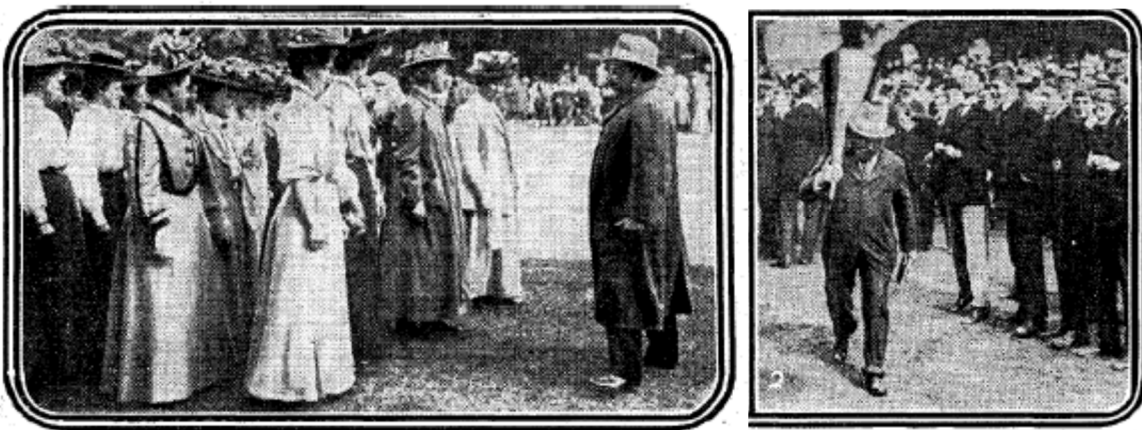


Fig. 12. Rehearsals of the *Dover Pageant* (1908). The caption for the image on the right reads “Although the Dover Pageant will not be performed until the end of next month, rehearsals of the 2,000 performers engaged are already in active progress. Above Mr. Louis N. Parker is seen putting some of his lady performers through their paces.” The caption for the image on the right reads, “Mr. Louis N. Parker’s megaphone excites the merriment of Dover schoolboys.”

Daily Mirror, June 19, 2008.

Page 8.

HUMOURS & CONTRASTS OF THE ROMSEY PAGEANT.

KNIGHTS OF THE MIDDLE AGES CARRY UMBRELLAS AND WEAR OVERCOATS.

Not even at Oxford, where performers in the pageant cycle through the streets in early British costumes, have more curious contrasts been seen than those at Romsey, where a pageant is now in progress. (1) King Edgar wears an overcoat in the rain. (2) Sussex costumes were under umbrellas. (3) An early Bishop of Salisbury (the Rev. G. Yarnall) strikes a modern pose. (4) Henry VIII, Bishop of Winchester, strikes a capricious pose. (5) Warmer of a life, Mr. M. asks his way of a modern policeman. The last member has seriously interfered with the success of the pageant, the first performance of which was attended by Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll. Inset is Mr. F. R. Benson, who organized the pageant. (Daily Mirror photographs.)

Miss Sylvia Caldwell, dressed in the garb of a Saxon princess, being led to her place in the pageant by a lady in a straw hat.

A crusader, mounted on a white horse, having his armor braced on by a Saxon warrior and a charming lady in a costume of 1790.

Saxon noble, wearing his helmet and wig, and carrying his shield, takes his arms and ancient costume to the pageant-ground in a modern handbag. (Daily Mirror photographs.)

In the olden days Romsey had an abbess of its own. Her representative in the pageant is now standing behind scaffolding made by trade union carpenters.

Chaired by knights, gentlemen, barons, Saxon peasants, and Elizabethan squires, Princess Louise was thrown into her carriage by Mr. F. R. Benson. (Daily Mirror photograph.)

Figure 13. "Humours & Contrasts of the Romsey Pageant"

Daily Mirror, June 27, 1907.

THE PAGEANT CRAZE - *CURIOUS CONTRASTS* SEEN IN OXFORD'S STREETS.



Many curious sights are now to be seen at Oxford, all the inhabitants of which are preparing for pageant work. On rehearsal days the good people of the city, all most dignified citizens at ordinary times, may be seen walking about the streets in fancy dress and looking like Maitland's students

returning from a fancy-dress ball. (1) A pretty boy who figures as the young Duke of Gloucester. (2) Women of Queen Elizabeth's time going to the pageant on an omnibus. (3) Man of the sixteenth century smoking in the street.—(*Daily Mirror* photographs.)



Although on the pageant ground things appear in their proper place, all is paradoxical, and amusing when seen in the streets. (1) Monk of the Middle Ages working a cinematograph. (2) Lady of the Pompadour period walking to the pageant ground with a Regency-coat hat and cloak

over a powdered wig. (3) 1540 talks to 1887 as a leatherstock made in the sixteenth century. (4) Man in a costume simulates behind the time cycles as a 1887 model. (5) Respectable citizens trying to look serious in Henry VIII. clothes.—(*Daily Mirror* photographs.)

Figure 14. "The Pageant Craze"

Daily Mirror, June 25, 1907.



Figure 15. "Rehearsing To-Day's Pageant at St. Albans" ("Probably the most striking thing about a pageant, apart from its beauty and colour, are the weird contrasts met with behind the scenes. (1) A (x) of the year A.D. 61 photographing his friends with a miniature camera concealed in his hands. (2) Men in armour wearing bowler hats.")

Daily Mirror, July 15, 1907.

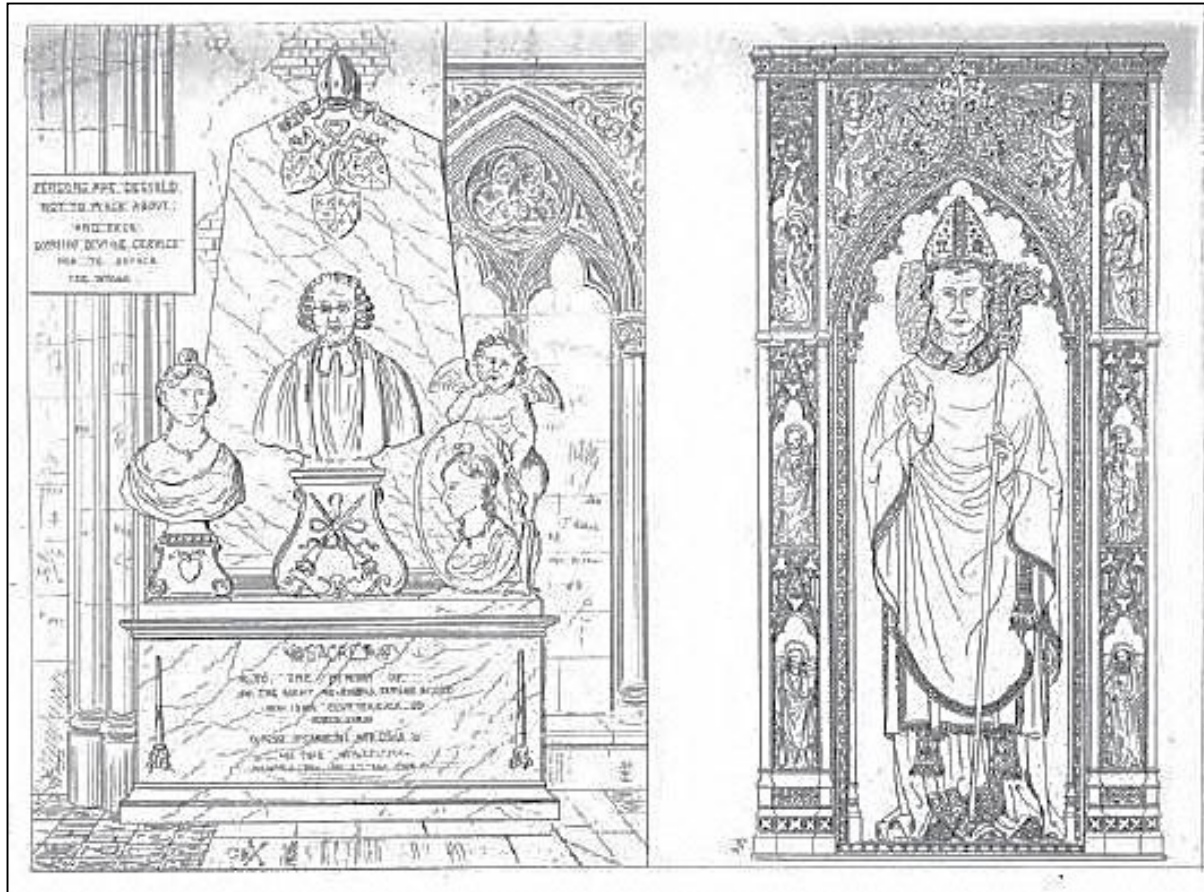


Figure 16. "Sacred art of the nineteenth century by comparison with the fourteenth century"

A.W. Pugin, *Contrasts* (Appendix).



Figure 17. "London Laughs: St. George's Pageant" (The original caption reads: "George. If this little lot turns out to be just another advertisement for somebody's branded margarine, I'm going to be bitterly disappointed.")

Joseph Lee, *Evening News*, April 21, 1954.

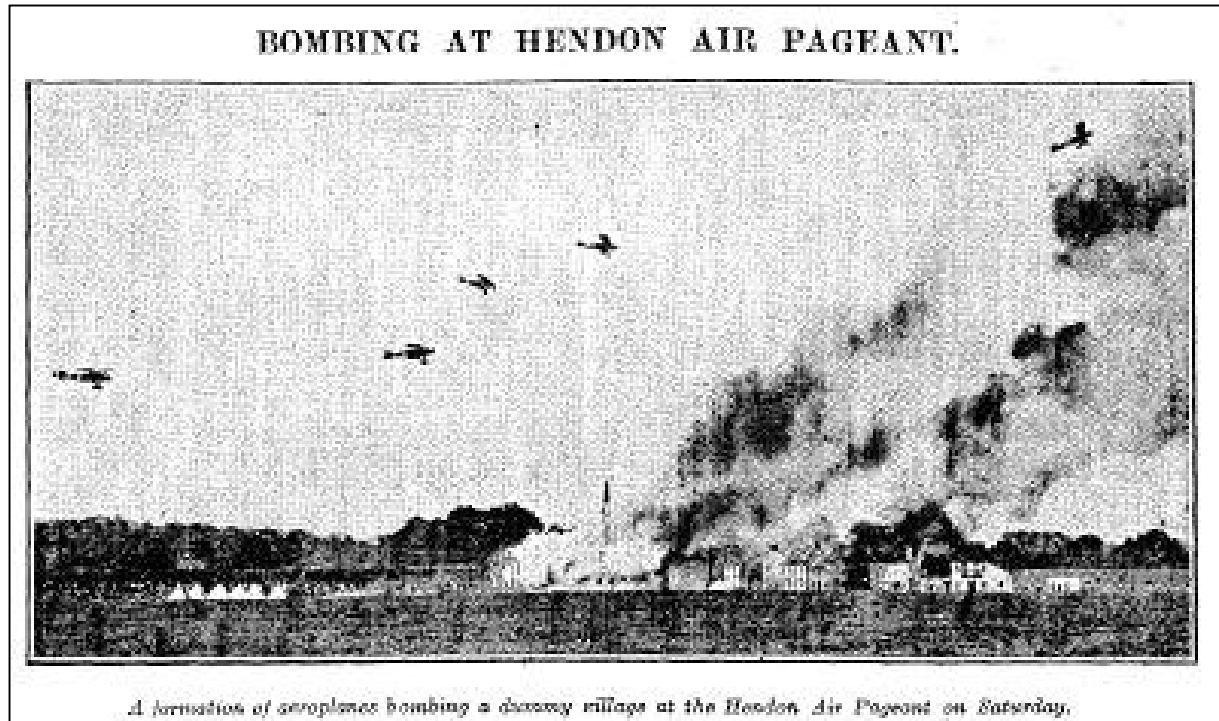


Figure 18. "Bombing At Hendon Air Pageant." ("A formation of aeroplanes bombing a dummy village at the Hendon Air Pageant on Saturday.")

The Times of London, July 4, 1921.



Figure 19. The audience of *The Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*. The “tent city” and “mini-Mississippi” river created for the *Pageant and Masque* are visible in the background. In the foreground is Charles Niehaus’ statue, *The Apotheosis of St. Louis*.

Percy MacKaye (PMK) Papers.



Figure 20. The relationship between the *Pageant and Masque*, the proposed charter, and the ideal of 'civic perfection.'

St. Louis Globe-Democrat, March 1914, PMK Papers.



Figure 21. Charles Leydendecker's poster for the *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*.

PMK Papers.

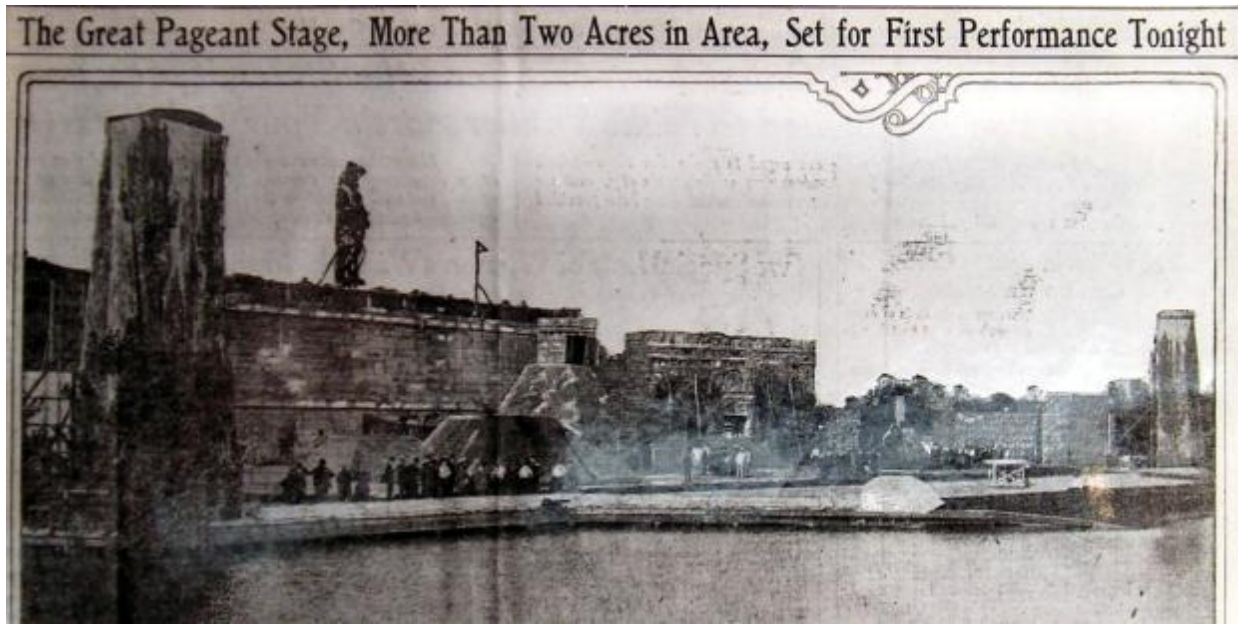


Figure 22. The “Great Pageant Stage.” Visible to the left and right of the stage are the towers that housed communications and lighting equipment. On the back wall can be seen “Wasapedan,” the giant bear. Composed of hundreds of small lights, Wasapedan was one of the *Masque*’s more spectacular features. Figures standing in the foreground, at the base of the smaller, stage-right mound, give a sense of the scale of the production. Next to the smaller mound can be seen the central mound, with the “temple” of Saint Louis at its apex.

PMK Papers.

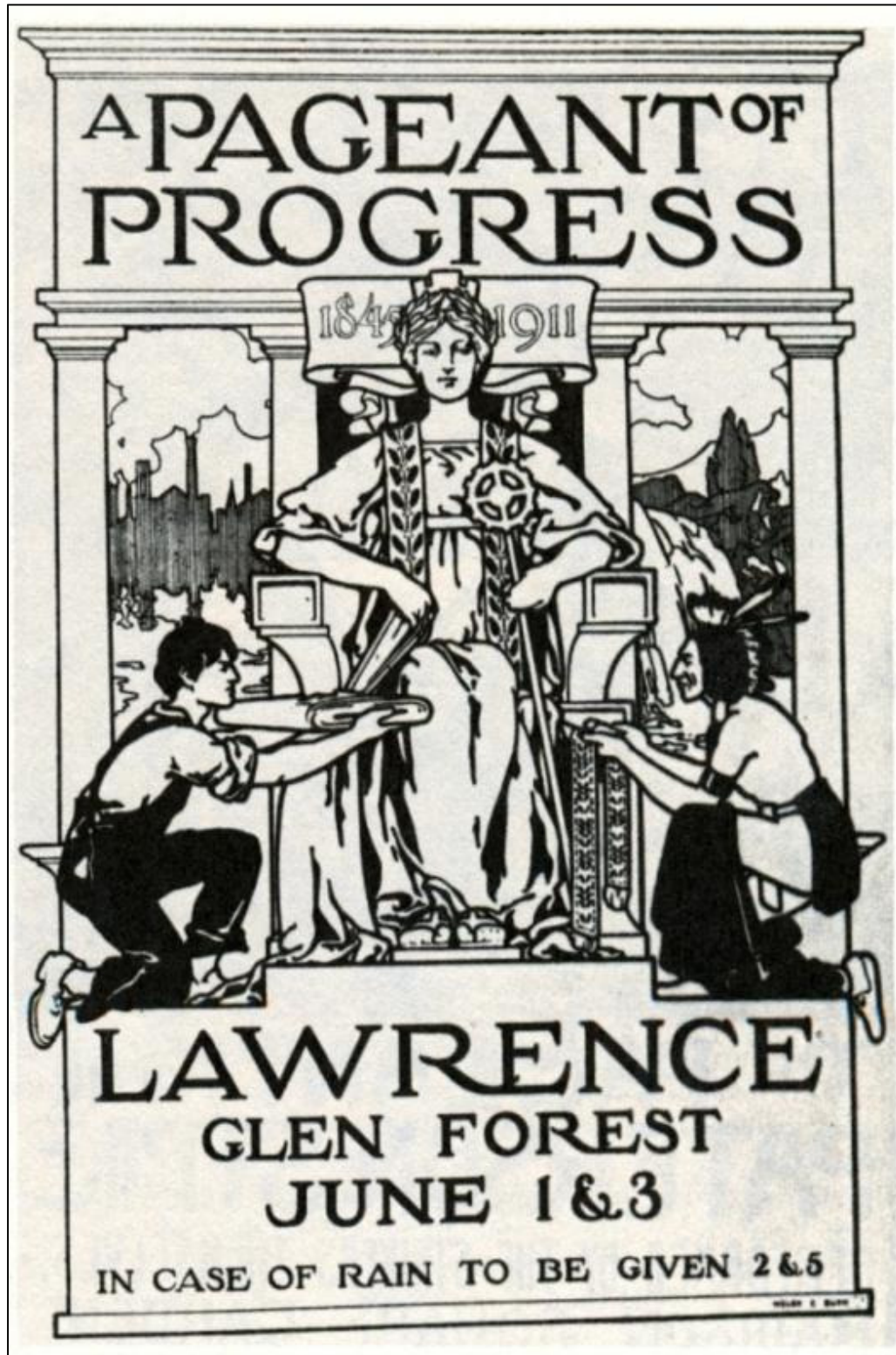


Figure 23. Poster for *A Pageant of Progress* in Lawrence, Massachusetts (1911).

Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 129.



Figures 25, 26 and 27. Moundbuilders rehearsing the Prelude.

PMK Papers.



Figure 28. The puppet Cahokia sits on the central steps of the mound with the child Saint Louis in his lap. In the background is the shrine from which Saint Louis emerges as a grown man in knight's armor in the Second Act of the *Masque*.

PMK Papers.



Figure 29. MacKaye holds Cahokia's hand; on the back of this photograph MacKaye wrote "my Über-marionette."

PMK Papers.



Figure 30. MacKaye rehearses Raymond Koch, the actor playing the role of Gold.

PMK Papers.



Figure 31. The role of Saint Louis was played by a St. Louis area medical student.
PMK Papers.



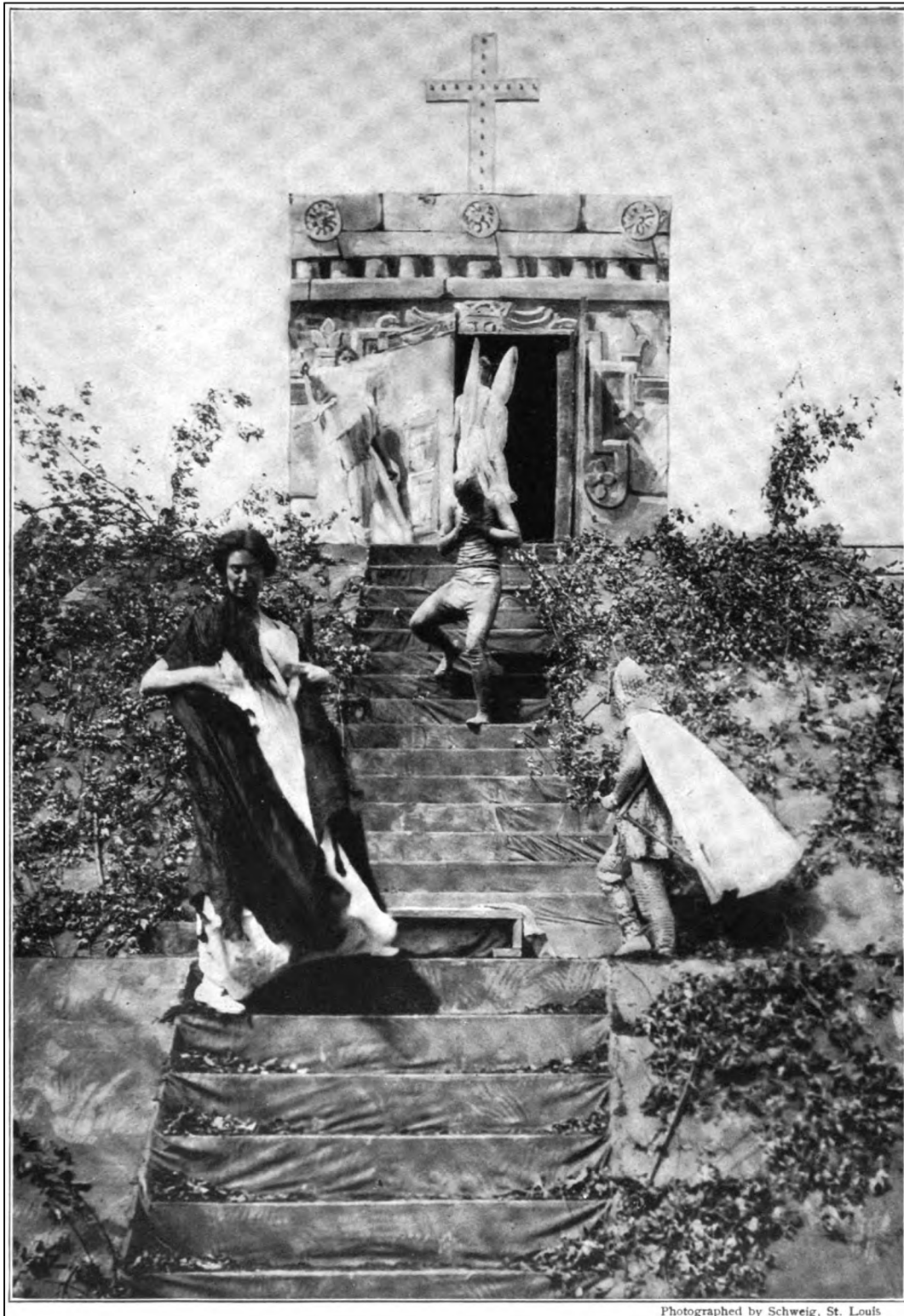
Figure 32. Gold and the Earth Elements. Gold is the figure slightly left of center wearing heavy chains around his neck.

PMK Papers.



Figure 33. Saint Louis stands in front of the temple at the top of the mound. Below him (in descending order) are Love, Imagination, and Gold (surrounded by Earth Elements and Pioneer wrestlers). At the base of the center mound stand two of the World Adventurers (from left, Oceania and Africa) and several of the Brother Cities on horseback.

PMK Papers.



Photographed by Schweig, St. Louis

Figure 34. Imagination races down the center mound after defeating Gold. Earth Elements disappear into the shrine as Saint Louis looks on.

World's Work 28, August 1914, 394.



Figure 35. *Towards a World Commune* (Act Three).

Russkii-sovetskii teatr, 1917–1921: Dokumenty i materialy.

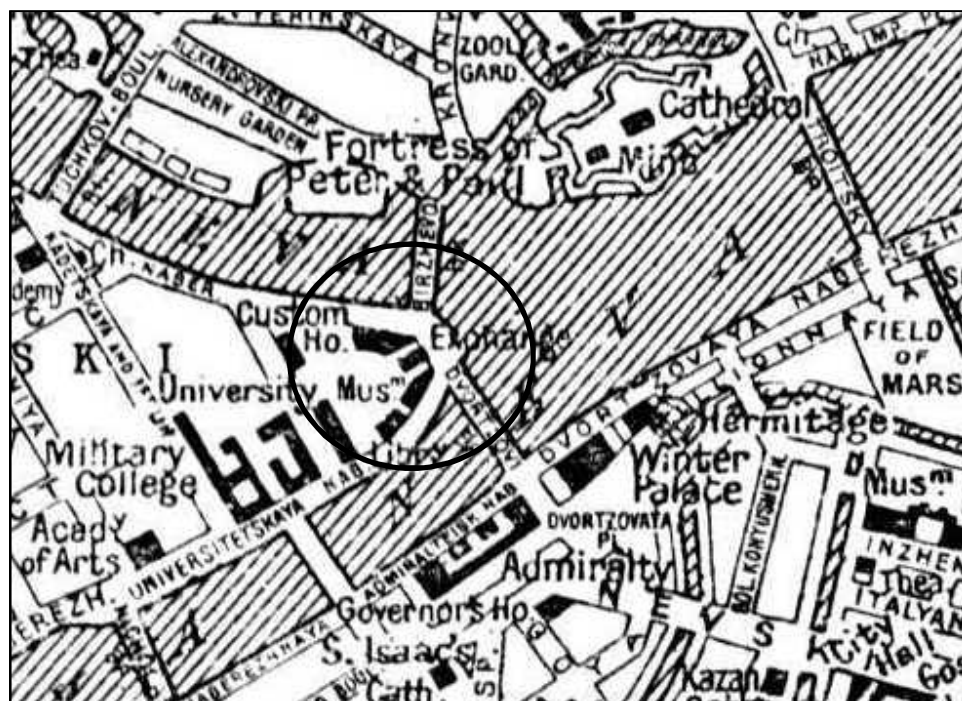
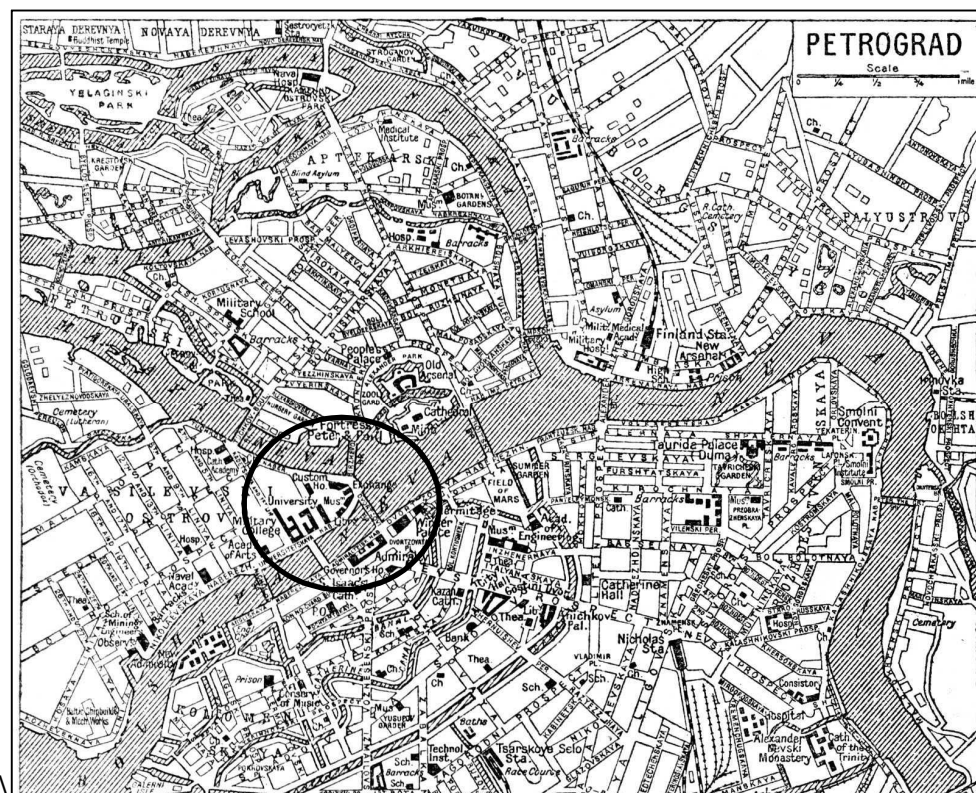


Figure 36. Ilya Repin's *Barge-Haulers on the Volga* (1873).



Figure 37. Toilers in *The Storming of the Winter Palace*.

Russkii-sovetskii teatr, 1917–1921: Dokumenty i materialy.



Figures 38 and 39. Maps of Petrograd in 1922. Circles indicate the site of the Stock Exchange Building.



Figure 40. Ilya Repin's *Easter Procession in the region of Kursk* (1883).



Figure 41. *The Crucession* by A. Bom (1924).



Figure 42. Rehearsal photograph In the foreground are soldiers returning from the war. In the recessed central space sits an effigy of the Tsar on his throne. Above him rises the Imperial Eagle, which is replaced by the Red Star towards the end of Act Three.

Russkii-sovetskii teatr, 1917–1921: Dokumenty i materialy.



Figure 43. *Alphonse de Lamartine Rejecting the Red Flag in 1848* by Felix Philippoteaux (1848).



Figure 44. Photograph taken by Aleksandr Rodchenko during a 1932 physical culture demonstration in Moscow.

In Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*.

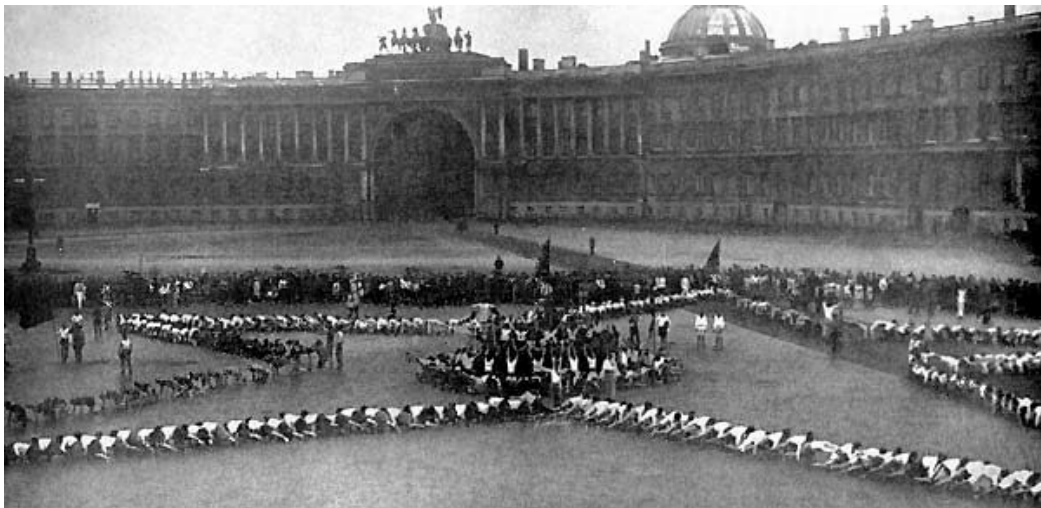


Figure 45. Youth club members forming the shape of a star in Uritsky Square, photographer unknown, 1926.

In Fülöp-Miller, *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*.



Figure 46. Natan Altman's design for *Towards a World Commune*.

Russkii-sovetskii teatr, 1917–1921: Dokumenty i materialy.

Table 1. Segment of production chart from *Toward a World Commune*

No.	Action	Players	Leaders	Costumes	Props	Enter from	Toward	Music group	Music	Light effects
35	Appearance of Hungarians fleeing reactionary forces.	50 men, 50 women, 25 children	Cherkov, Fedorov, Zueva	100 fugitives, 25 children	Household utensils, a "Hungary" poster	Below, from left corner of Exchange	Extreme right parapet	Fanfares		
36	A new wave of workers appears from behind a column.	300 workers, 100 female workers	Beliavsky, Semenova	300 worker blouses		Below, from right side of Exchange and from behind columns	Central stage	Central orchestra		
37	Leaders appear in the middle. "To arms." The crowd responds, "To arms." A red star flares. Red soldiers enter. Leaders scatter red stars. Soldiers raise their weapons. An oath. They leave the steps with weapons leveled.	500 soldiers, 15 leaders	Pakhomov, Smirnov	500 overcoats, 15 leather jackets	200 red stars, 500 rifles, poster: "The Workers' Defender Is the Red Army"	Leaders and soldiers from the middle	Scatter below to left and right	Fanfares, choir	"Bravely Forward, Communards"	Red star lights up

Figure 47. Part of the score created by the directors of *Towards a World Commune*. Two pages of the score are published in *Massovye prazdnestva* (Leningrad, 1926). The translation here, by James von Geldern, appears in *Bolshevik Festivals*, 190-191.



Figure 48. Berlin Love Parade, Andreas Gursky (1994)

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